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# THINK FOR YOURSELF





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# THINK FOR YOURSELF

LETTERS ON THE FORMATION  
OF A PERSONAL CREED

By

T. SHARPER KNOWLSON

Author of "The Art of Thinking" (54th thousand);  
"Originality" (6th thousand), etc.



LONDON

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COBHAM HOUSE, 24 AND 26 WATER LANE, E.C.4



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## *The Letter which started the ball rolling*

LONDON.

DEAR SIR,

You may remember once on a time how you saw a small boy enter your back yard, surreptitiously, and steal a red rubber ring from an old pickle bottle; and how you engraved with your own pen a formidable looking document ordering him to report to the Police Superintendent for theft! I still have that scaring bit of parchment somewhere in the attic. . . .

A few years have passed since then. I have arrived at man's estate and man's responsibilities. The problems of life are before me and all around me. What I want to do is to think them out for myself, and I need someone to tell me where to begin and how to start. Reading what others have said is always interesting but finally unsatisfactory. There are authorities on both sides of all great issues. What can the ordinary layman do in such circumstances? Isn't it better to start at the beginning and tread the road of inquiry for one's self?

If you can help me with this difficulty I shall be grateful. . . .

Heartily yours,

ROGER VAN HORNE.

My reaction to this letter was instantaneously sympathetic. I saw where this man stood. I realized how he felt. I knew what he wanted. And I resolved to help him, not by writing him one letter, but a whole series.



# SUBJECTS

## FIRST SERIES

LETTER	PAGE
I. HOW TO BEGIN THINKING SERIOUSLY ON LIFE'S PROBLEMS . . . . .	11
II. YOURSELF AND THE UNIVERSE . . . . .	19
III. THINKING : AND SOME OF ITS IMPLICATIONS . . . . .	27
IV. INTERROGATION AND THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD . . . . .	42
V. WHAT IS A FACT? . . . . .	52
VI. WORDS ! WORDS ! WORDS ! . . . . .	60
VII. WHY WE DON'T THINK ALIKE . . . . .	73
VIII. THE ETERNAL . . . . .	82
IX. THE PHILOSOPHY OF MYSTERY . . . . .	91

## SECOND SERIES

I. NATURE AND SPIRIT . . . . .	101
II. THE PRINCIPLE OF AUTHORITY . . . . .	113
III. FACTORS THAT AFFECT CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	124
IV. WHY SOME THOUGHTS MAKE US " DIZZY " . . . . .	138
V. RIGHT AND WRONG . . . . .	148
VI. VALUES : THIS IS BETTER THAN THAT . . . . .	160
VII. HOW TO ANALYSE AN ARGUMENT . . . . .	169
VIII. IMITATION AND ORIGINALITY . . . . .	180
IX. CREATIVE READING . . . . .	191
X. MENTAL HYGIENE . . . . .	201
XI. WHAT IS THE AIM OF EXISTENCE? . . . . .	213



# **FIRST SERIES**





## LETTER I

### How to Begin Thinking Seriously on Life's Problems

DEAR ROGER,

When you were a small boy, and lived next door to me in a provincial city, you once asked your father a profoundly metaphysical question. You said, "Daddy, when was God born?" Daddy knew a great deal about history—the date of the battle of Thermopylæ, the fall of Constantinople, the conquests of Genghis Khan, the wars of Napoleon, the details of Magna Charta—but here was a request for a date which floored him. I forget exactly what he said he told you by way of answer; and, probably, the incident has vanished from your own recollection; but I think he fell back on those words about Melchizedek who was "without beginning of days or end of life." He tried to make it clear that God was a time-less conception.

I refer to this incident in order to show that at one time in your life you displayed some ability to think for yourself. Perhaps that ability has been temporarily obscured by other activities, and only needs the right opportunity to manifest itself in a new and profitable fashion. Maybe your letter to me is a new evidence of this early desire to understand yourself and to fathom the world of thought. At any rate some urge is upon you to seek and to discover; and you feel a need of those instruments without which the journey will not be safe or successful: a map, a chart, a compass. So you ask the advice of an older man.

## II

I'm not so sure I can do what you want me to do, but I'll try. . . . There are many ways in which you can

begin business as a *Thinker for Yourself*. One of them is to draw up a list of mental certainties—facts about which the great majority of mankind are agreed. For instance, you can put this down as the first certainty: "I exist." You smile. Yes, but I am quite serious. That you exist is obvious. It is self-evident to you and a fact to me; but it is not so simple a matter after all—not when you begin to ask questions. What is the I, or ego, that exists, and about which you are so certain? If you answer that it is *your self*, of which you are *conscious*, the questioner asks further, What is this self? and what is consciousness? These are difficult questions indeed. . . . Life is like that. You take a very simple thing—sleep, for instance—about which everybody knows something from experience, then ask a few questions and you find yourself enveloped in mystery. The unknown is just a step from the known. That is why a tiny child can puzzle a philosopher.

## III

"I exist!" Well, and what is existence? Can you define it? Try. . . . Difficult? . . . It is. A philosopher once said it was "the still and simple precipitate of the oscillation between beginning to be and ceasing to be." Does that tell you what existence is? I do not think it does. My purpose in quoting it is, once more, to illustrate the profundity of the things we know. On the surface everything seems to be as clear as crystal. We talk about existence as if we knew it from A to Z, and yet one little question will plunge us beneath the waters of ignorance. . . . And this leads me to say, my young friend, that you need not always be distressed if you find yourself unable to define a thing you feel you know. You know what consciousness is: you have it now, as you read this letter: you will lose it when you fall asleep: you will regain it when you wake: but neither you nor anybody else can define consciousness. It can be *described* but not defined.

## IV

Still, whenever possible, get a good definition of all important words. These definitions isolate the idea

from other and similar ideas. That is the service of lexicography to clear thinking. . . . But don't imagine that because you have a dictionary definition of existence, or consciousness, you have captured the thing-in-itself. All you have is the right meaning of the *word*. This is important, no doubt, but existence and consciousness are not to be embodied in phrases. They are too vast.

"I exist!" It is the difference between life and death. Our departed relatives and friends no longer exist in the body. They exist as memories and potent influences, but we do not see them, nor hear their voices. Physically, they have vanished. Not so you and I. We exist. But although we have life, we do not know what life is in itself. So you see how this certainty is compassed about with uncertainties. Some of them I shall deal with later.

But if you exist as an individual, and a person, it can only be because there is a something, physical and mental, called the *me*, and another something which is the *not-me*. Over against "I exist," we must place "THE UNIVERSE EXISTS." That is the second certainty. We look above, around and beyond: and we discover the worlds of Nature and of Civilization. The stars are not imaginations. The planets were not invented by astronomers. New York, Boston, Paris and London are not simply names on the map. They are real cities. Everybody has this certainty, but not everybody interprets it in the same way. We have the realists who say that matter is real, as Dr. Johnson did when he kicked the stone, and the idealists who say that it is ideal; which means that the reality is in our own sensations and perceptions, and that actually these external phenomena do not exist as objects. Probably you have met people who affirm that God is All, and that matter is a delusion of mortal mind. But they accept this delusion as a reality of experience. If they did not, they could not draw an intelligent distinction between health and disease. Neither could they be so certain as to the difference between a one-pound note and a fiver.

## VI

Bishop Berkeley, who was one of the greatest of idealists, once hung himself up by a rope in order to get the sensations of hanging. And he nearly did hang himself in the service of psychology. They were to be *real* sensations, of course, not ideal fancies. So you will understand that people who suggest that the Universe is an imagination have a way of taking it as a real thing after all. If it were not, then Science with its laws, its discoveries, its utilities, and its prophecies would be merely a tale that is told. Don't forget that.

You may say, "Yes, but is it not possible that mind may be the ultimate reality, and matter merely a temporal form of it?" Undoubtedly. But that does not take away the reality of matter *as an experience here and now*. I have met many idealists, and they all accept the material universe as a fact. They have trains to catch, and taxes to pay. They even grumble about the butcher's bills.

Some day we will go into this again.

## VII

The third certainty to add to your list is this: **THAT MAN DID NOT CREATE THE UNIVERSE.** Again, the obvious. Man is a product not a creator. He can adapt and modify; he can change and invent; but he cannot create. His improvements upon the devices and methods of Nature are always dependent on pre-existing matter. He may make a gun to fire a shot one hundred miles, or an airplane to fly round the world; but he cannot create new elements for these purposes. He must use what he finds.

Now if man did not create the Universe, there is an alternative: (1) either the Universe created itself, or (2) a Creative Force accomplished the task. It appears to be more reasonable to accept the latter alternative. To suppose that this ordered Plan of Existence came into being of itself only raises a smile. Why did the Universe desire to originate itself? If there was Nothing to start with, how did the Nothing become a Something? These

questions could be multiplied indefinitely, and their total effect would compel us to regard the self-causation of the world as a completely unsatisfactory proposition. Quite evidently a creative force is responsible for the visible Universe and all that is in it. Some call this force by the name of God. Others, like Herbert Spencer, refer to it as the Eternal Energy. But there is one fact that reflection drives home with increasing force, namely, that the power and intelligence displayed in the creation of solar systems completely dwarfs anything that man could do or imagine. That is why humility is the primary quality of the true man of science—the kind of humility about which Faraday spoke so convincingly.

## VIII

A moment ago I referred to the marks of intelligence in the Universe. By that I mean the presence of *intention*. There is everywhere the evidence of *order*. *Law* prevails, and a law is a specific method of operation directed towards an end in view. Did chance decide the law of gravity, or give beauty to the design of the snowflake? . . . Intention, however, is seen in the plan of the whole as well as the details of its parts. The Universe stands for a Mighty Will—Schopenhauer constructed a whole philosophy on that conception, as others had done before him. But if we are to evaluate what we find in Creation, and judge it according to the mental standards by which we judge human qualities, then Will presupposes intelligence, in the human sense of the word, the only difference being one of extent not of kind. David Hume was one of the most sceptical of philosophers, but he could say that “the whole frame of Nature bespeaks an intelligent author, and no rational inquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion.”

Why should we be compelled to ascribe superb intelligence to the creation of the Intergraph and deny it to the creation of an atom? Why should man claim intelligence for himself and deny it to the parentage that in the far past produced him?

The works of creation and the works of man have one point in common; they contain the evidences of a *plan*.

## IX

Now let us see how far we have travelled. You wrote down three certainties:

- (1) I exist.
- (2) The Universe exists.
- (3) Man did not create the Universe.

Out of these, or in connection with them, there came certain implications, some of which are associated with fundamental problems in philosophy.

"I exist" led us to the following:

- (a) What is the Ego, or Self?
- (b) What is consciousness?
- (c) The difficulty of defining in words the facts known to experience.

"The Universe exists" opened out further problems:

- (a) The difference between Realism and Idealism.
- (b) How we know the Eternal World.
- (c) The reality of Experience.

"Man did not create the Universe" suggested number of reflections:

- (a) Self-causation or a Creative Force.
- (b) The Universe has marks of *Intention*.
- (c) Also Intelligences as seen in a *Plan*.

Here, then, is a whole series of investigations, most of which are fundamental issues in philosophy. Your first task is to master the vocabulary. Get the accurate meaning of the terms involved. I do not say that when the term Ego, or Self, is clearly understood you will understand the thing-in-itself. Nobody does. But you will avoid misconceptions, and you will develop your mind in the art of drawing distinctions. The chief terms, so far, are these: ego, self-consciousness, definition, reality, experience, realism, causation, knowledge, intention, plan.

Use a large and comprehensive dictionary: it will give you the best service. Of course, if you have access

to a good vocabulary of philosophy, like Baldwin's, or even Calderwood's, use it intelligently. But you may be occasionally confused by the technicality of the definitions and discussions. However, do not despair if these aids to knowledge are sometimes ineffective. Knowledge does not come in a moment, or in a fixed period. It comes slowly. Understanding is a growth. Learn to wait for results.

## XI

In offering the following questions by way of exercises, my object is to impart facility in handling the issues involved; secondly, to display the essential difficulties of the inquiry; finally, to show that the attempt to explain the mysteries of existence on purely material lines has been completely unsuccessful.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

1. If you doubt your own existence, is there not one certainty left, namely, that you do doubt your own existence? Is not complete doubt, therefore, an irrational procedure? You cannot doubt that you doubt.
2. What becomes of the ego during dreamless sleep?
3. What is the chemistry of the brain which produces consciousness and thought? Or is there a something more than brain in it?
4. If you were to deny the reality of the external world, could you claim that your own existence, physical and mental, had a more real existence? If so, why?
5. If Science is organized knowledge, how is it possible to have an organized knowledge of an unorganized and planless Universe? Is Science an orderly account of a disorderly world? Or is it the revelation of the plan according to which Nature works?



6. Examine the statement, "Experience is the one reality."
7. What is the difference between the reality of a hallucination, as an experience, and the reality of enjoying Milton's *Il Penseroso*, as an experience?
8. Criticize this statement, "I have a perfect right to believe that the Universe was Self-caused." What is the "right" here exercised? Do we know anything in the form of an effect—like the Universe—that is Self-caused?
9. "Kepler's laws of motion are not *intentions*: they are simply modes in which Nature acts." What have you to offer in answer to this objection? Is not a planet's orbit a mode? also the course of a comet? Why are there any modes at all? And is a mode something that was never intended?
10. How are the words of this printed page, as objective facts, conveyed to your mind, thus forming a subjective experience?
11. As man is weak and powerless compared with the mighty creation of which he forms a part, is there anything which compensates him for this inferiority complex? In what is he superior, for example, to the Sun?

## LETTER II

### Yourself and the Universe

DEAR ROGER,

You learn to think for yourself by analysing facts, and by coming to your own conclusions. As conclusions, they may be right or wrong, but they are *yours*. Later reflection may cause you to modify them, and that means growth. The other way of gaining knowledge is to read what writers have said, and to accept it as truth mainly because they, as masters, have said it.

"But," you object, "am I really capable of coming to decisions on great questions? What can an average man do to invent his own philosophy? Is he not compelled to follow in the footsteps of others who have more ability?" I answer these questions by saying that you actually *do* form your own opinion on great questions. For instance, after a lot of reading and reflection you have decided that man survives the stroke of death. . . . And any man who thinks at all forms a working creed of life. This is philosophy as he understands it. In forming it he has not neglected to consult the opinions of the wise, some of which he accepted and some he rejected: but what he knows and what he believes are mainly the result of his own cogitation. There is nothing scholarly about its phrases. You could write its truths down, in maxim form, on a sheet of paper; but there it is—clear and positive, even though marked with obvious shortcomings.

Now a more ambitious attempt to form a philosophy of life calls for the employment of certain methods of inquiry. I cannot deal with all of them, but will select one or two of the more important. The first of them is

best introduced in the words of Pascal. He said—and I quote from memory—"Man is a feeble reed trembling in the midst of creation, but he is a reed that can think. A breath of wind, a drop of water, can deprive him of life. Yet even if the universe itself rose up to destroy him he would be greater in his death than Creation would be in its triumph, for he would be conscious of his approaching defeat while the universe would know nothing of its victory."

## II

This superiority of consciousness over unconsciousness, and of intelligence over blind superpowerful forces, is one that you should grasp thoroughly. Set one over against the other in this way:

A  
Consciousness  
Intelligence

B  
Unconsciousness  
Non-intelligence

Why is the A section superior to B? Because it stands for greater complexity and refinement; it has self-realization. Even an aggressive materialist would not say that a stone is superior to a human brain. He, too, has his standard of values. To him, and to us, the word superior conveys the idea of an excellence which is possessed by one thing and not by another.

Here is an interesting situation. Unless we admit the existence of a consciousness higher than our own, we have to conclude that man's consciousness is superior to unconsciousness. It means that the creative energy "from which all things proceed," to use Spencer's words, is inferior because it has no self-realization. But how can the inferior beget the superior? Observe that I am not playing with words; I am taking plain meanings and applying them to the larger issues of the world as we know it. Spencer himself phrased it well. After speaking of "the all-embracing mystery," he goes on to say, "And along with this arises the paralysing thought—what if, of all this that is incomprehensible to us, there exists no comprehension anywhere?" Yes, what? Only this: that man can spare himself the impertinence

of believing that his limited brain is the only form of Higher Intelligence. As Henry Osborn Taylor puts it: "I must have a cause who is all that I am."

### III

Armed with this method of estimating values, let us look again at the panorama of existence. What is the first thought you receive after dwelling on the immensity of creation and the story of human life from earth's earliest ages? It is this: that a Plan is being carried out which man did not begin, and which he will not bring to an end. He himself, indeed, is part of the Plan. The situation is like that of a traveller who, having an hour to spare, enters a picture theatre to find a five-reel film well on the way. A plot is being evolved before his eyes; but, not knowing the beginning, he is more or less puzzled with the events that occur on the screen. And as he must leave before the conclusion, he departs with only a partial knowledge of what it is all about. So it is with life. The beginning and the end are wrapped in mystery. We know a little about the middle section, for we are called upon to play a part in it. But the Plot of the Play, which an Inscrutable Energy devised and set in motion, defies our analysis.

This is one of our certainties. Nobody denies that such a Plan exists. Even the mechanists admit it, for you can't have a world-mechanism without a plan and a system of order. The process of evolution, whatever meaning we give to the word, is not a process from nothing to nothing. It passes from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous, from simplicity to complexity. Emerson puts it in a nutshell: "The gases gather to the solid firmament; the chemic lump arrives at the plant and grows; arrives at the quadruped and walks; arrives at the man and thinks."

We talk a good deal about the laws of Nature, but what is a law of Nature? A method of operation; a definite manner of action—Kepler's laws, for instance. Very well. But what is the implication of such a law? There is only one answer: the *intention* to do a certain thing in a certain way. A law of Nature is a part of the

universal Plan. It used to be said that *order* is heaven's first law. Certainly it is the one law of the visible Universe.

## IV

Again, in looking at the world, seek for unity in diversity. If you do not, you will soon be in trouble. Take the existence of pain and suffering. If you dwell on this aspect of life to the exclusion of others, equally true and evident, you will soon agree with Buddha and Schopenhauer. Pessimism will be your portion. If you confine your attention to the cruelties of Nature, "red in tooth and claw," then consider human history in the same spirit, you will be prepared to believe that man is a creature without hope—the plaything of the President of the Immortals. . . . To think rightly you must think in perspective; that is, get all the facts and see them as a whole. This is unity in diversity.

The key words here are material and spiritual; visible and invisible. Take mind and body as an illustration. Can you tell me where your body ends and your mind begins? You cannot. Nobody can. There is undoubtedly a vast difference between the physical operations of the bodily organs and the almost desperate subtlety of thought; nevertheless, the ego, or self, is not all body neither is it all mind. It is both, *plus*. Your body and your mind are the evidences of *you*. The visible and the invisible are *one*. . . . With this thought in your mind do you wonder that Goethe regarded Nature as the body of the Deity? Is it surprising that man himself should be looked upon as the image of God—an invisible and external self, enclosed within a visible and temporal tabernacle?

If there be an ugly side to Nature's life—its parasites, its insect pests, its love for the strong and its damnation for the weak—there is also a beautiful side: the wonders of the heavens, the magic of sunrise and sunset, the witchery of the moonlight on the lake, and the presence of the lily, more marvellous than Solomon in all his glory. Malevolence is offset by benevolence, selfishness by altruism. All things in Nature work together—even what we call good and evil—and no right

conclusions are possible unless we recognize this fact. In other words, you will have to be a Monist of some kind; that is, a believer in unity amid diversity. Your unity will doubtless be of the spiritual order. With Spinoza it was God, but not the Christian Father: with Emerson it was the Over Soul, but not Jehovah: with Jonathan Edwards it was God, the Supreme Arbiter of destiny, not Eternal Love.

The main point, however, is to avoid the habit of taking a single group of facts, and resolving them into a system. Thus, the pessimists raise suffering from its position as a part of life to the false dignity of being the whole. Nobody denies the existence of what appear to be defects in the plan of life, but it is always possible to find a positive for every negative. To eliminate "cruelty" from Nature's world would prepare the way for a downfall of the animal kingdom. It would destroy the balance of Nature. There is a reason, somewhere, for everything that happens. Not that we have found these reasons. We have not. Nature is unsatisfactory: that is why its ethics appear to be lower than human ethics.

Many people have proposed amendments to the processes and results of creation. Christians have not been wanting who have said that they would have preferred a world in which the struggle for existence was absent. Ingersoll also ventured to suggest that if health had been catching instead of disease, it would have been an improvement. Agriculturists have complained that numerous insects could profitably have been omitted from the scheme. And almost all of us, at one time or another, have thought that we could have engineered a better system of climate and weather. Haven't we? . . . Nevertheless, we may be mistaken. When Nature interferes with our comfort and convenience we feel entitled to a grumble. When an elder of the Church considers the death-roll from snake-bites, and the depredations of the boll weevil, also the alarming expense of abolishing mosquitoes, he says, nonchalantly, "We

sometimes have to spend a few dollars in exterminating God's creatures."

Now let us see how far we have travelled. We began with the certainty that consciousness was an advance on unconsciousness. If it is not, it is either inferior or equal—which? The same argument applies to intelligence and non-intelligence. This matter of superiority and inferiority should be understood and mastered. It is one of the key positions of all thought.

The next point was that although there are evidences of a Plan, its complete meaning is obscure: that is, every meaning beyond the one which answers, "Life is meant to be lived." For most people that answer is sufficient, but you and I are seeking for more intimate meanings.

The third point was the importance of seeking unity amid diversity. The creation, despite what looks like occasional civil war, is fundamentally a harmony. Truth lies in seeking a whole, not in isolating a part, even a big part.

## VII

The important words of this letter are: intelligence, non-intelligence, materialist, superior, inferior, unconsciousness, unknowable, beginning, end, unity, and pessimism. Study these terms carefully. Some of them contain a whole philosophy. Take the little word *end*. That alone will introduce you to teleology and a big controversy.

## VIII

If you are to learn to "think for yourself" you will have to *express* your thoughts. A thought in the mind and the "same" thought in words are often two different things. You need a friend with whom to discuss your findings, one by one: and you need a note-book, carefully indexed and dated, to record your progress, and to

retain critical views of value. By way of a beginning write down your own opinions on life as you know it. Answer the questions at the end of this letter. Don't say you are unprepared. Think awhile, then write what you now believe. You can make corrections later. The aim of this discipline is to compel a statement of your present thought, be it what it may. You may be astonished at your facility, or you may deplore your incapacity. Never mind. Get your pen and write. You will gain confidence as you proceed.

Cordially yours,

P.S.—Whenever a question or a problem seems to call for data which are not at once available, pass on to the next question. Have pages set apart in your note-book for comments on each of these letters, and for answers to the questions. Each bit of mental drill gives you more confidence.

### Questions and Problems

1. What would you say is the meaning of life? In other words what is its *intention*? Is it to satisfy ourselves, or is it the purpose of a Mind higher than our own?
2. If man had never appeared on the earth, would this affect our estimate of the aim of the planet's existence?
3. Is an uninhabited planet superior to one with intelligent life? If not, why?
4. How would you defend the claim that a man who plunges into the sea to rescue a drowning child is performing an action of greater value than that of a leopard leaping on a hart and killing it for food? What is this value? Wherein lies the essence of the superiority of the man's action?
5. After reading the history of your own country, and reflecting on the course of life as you have experi-



enced it, do you observe any evidences of a Supreme Moral Government over and above the justice which man tries to render to his fellows? Is every wrong righted, or do the innocent suffer for the guilty?

6. In view of the fact that events carry consequences which pass through several human generations, and indeed may be said to exert a permanent influence, can justice be executed in the space of one brief human career? If not, does man receive justice at all?
7. If, after death, you had the chance of being reborn into this life, would you accept it? Give reasons.
8. Do you think that the total of human happiness balances the total of human suffering in this life? How do you arrive at and justify your conclusion?
9. If progress be defined as "change with advantage," what progress has been made in America and Europe in political science and practice since 1776?
10. Compare the following from Voltaire's article on Man, with the previous thought of Pascal:

"Twenty years are required to bring man from the state of a plant, in which he exists in the womb of his mother, and from the state of an animal which is his condition in infancy, to a state in which the maturity of reason begins to make itself felt. Thirty centuries were necessary in which to discover even a little of his structure. An eternity would be required to know anything of his soul. But one moment suffices in which to kill him."

## LETTER III

### Thinking: and Some of its Implications

DEAR ROGER,

Thinking is often supposed to be a simple operation: and as easy as it is simple. It reminds me of the remark of an old man who spent most of his time sitting in his chair near the fire. Asked by a visitor how he spent his days, he answered, "Mostly I sets and thinks, and then again sometimes I just sets."

"What is the hardest work in the world?" asks Emerson, and he answers, "To think." So different a man as Henry Ford is of the same opinion. The history of great achievements is a striking commentary on this view. Newton thought for years about the existence of a power of cohesion, in connection with the earth and heavenly bodies, before he found the solution in gravity. Edison worked and thought through long periods before he found the way to electric light. One could fill pages with data of this sort. . . . The question arises, "Why is it so difficult to think?" There are several reasons, the chief of which are: (1) the profound nature of life and its associations; (2) the constant need of unlearning what has been learned; and (3) the divergence between our intellectual ambitions and our intellectual capacity.

## II

I will deal with these *seriatim*. The first reason concerns the essential profundity of the deeper issues of existence. Fortunately, these things do not interfere with practical life. In a general way we know our duties and privileges, and, on the surface, life can be lived without giving much attention to what lies behind

phenomena. The vast majority of people never think in the technical sense. They are guided by feeling and instinct. Not bad guides, either; otherwise human affairs would soon sink into decay. This is a fact, which, in itself, is highly significant. If the average man can adjust himself to the demands of life, can find a religion which settles his relationship to the eternal, and his attitude to events, and yet do no *thinking* in the exact sense of continuous rational inquiry, it would appear as if thought were a superfluous activity. This, of course, is untrue. As a matter of fact everybody thinks, but the thinking is not organized.

The knowledge required for daily living, and the reflection needed for its occasional difficulties, come without diligent search. It would be a hard life if our millions had to master the syllogism before they could decide to tenant a house or to take a journey. A brick-layer can digest a good luncheon although entirely ignorant of the chemistry of the process; and he may have a good working creed for daily life without even knowing that certain mysteries exist.

But the man of reflection, who is aware of such mysteries, is also aware of their resistant qualities. True, as we shall see, the resistance is not all of it in the thing in itself. Many a discoverer has a sense of shame that he wasted so much time in false efforts due to ignorance or misjudgment. But there is still a sense in which the old saying is true: "we knock our heads against stone walls" when we try to solve persistent problems.

### III

The second reason concerns the defects of the human mind as an instrument of research. History and experience show us how difficult it is to unlearn anything. When everybody believed that the sun revolved round the earth it was hard to begin to think that the earth revolved about the sun. Ideas become *fixed*. I know men who were taught in youth that the earth was round but flat, like a dime; and they believe it to this very day. Modern science is to them a myth and a source of merriment. They cannot unlearn the past. . . . You and I are not in the same predicament, but we are not absolutely free.

There is something tenacious about any idea which has made itself comfortable in the mind for a quarter of a century. It refuses to be dislodged, even when you present an ejectment order from the High Court of Reason.

But conservatism is not restricted to certain cases like those to which I have referred. It is seen in the history of many inventions and discoveries. Why did Harvey's theory of the circulation of the blood receive such hostile criticism? Because it went counter to accepted opinions. Nothing more. Why were railroads opposed? Because they militated against age-old modes of locomotion. Every science and industry has the same story to tell. To use a very hackneyed phrase, each one of us is a child of his age. We are steeped in the opinions, customs, ideas, and judgments that prevail. This does not mean that they are necessarily wrong. Many of them are sound to the core. But if we do have to unlearn something the process is like extracting a tooth. Only when a "fact" aches with a guilty conscience do we allow the mental extraction.

Now this tendency to hold back is responsible for the slow progress of thought in many spheres of knowledge. It makes thinking hard work because we have to pull down and build up again. Proposals for a change appear to be dangerous, or useless, and we resist them accordingly whether they concern our bodies or our souls.

#### IV

The third reason grows out of the other two. Between our ambition to know and our capacity for knowledge, there is a gap both deep and wide. With higher mental powers a new group of desirable solutions would be placed at the service of man. As it is, the sphere of the unknown, and apparently unknowable, is one we would like to explore; yet we have no means of access to it. There may be small hope of improving the brain, as a brain, especially as no improvement has been detected since the days of Cro-Magnon man. But brain and mind are not identical terms, despite an astonishing intimacy of connection; for if the brain has been stationary as a physical

organ for thousands of years, how is it that the mind goes on advancing?

Perhaps at some future date new abilities will be developed by the race opening a way to a new understanding of distant worlds and of the nature of our being. Meanwhile, we have the benefit of ignorance; for mystery in its final effect is elevating and inspiring. We are tenants of a world the greatness of which passes comprehension. Life is never trivial. To be alive is a privilege. I wonder how unaided Nature ever produced an individual who could have experiences to which she herself is a perfect stranger?

What happens when you sit down in a quiet room to *think*? I do not mean to ruminate, which is a sort of day-dreaming. I refer to ordered thoughts on a set problem, such as cause and effect in human actions: whether a man reaps what he sows, or whether he can sometimes escape justice altogether? Before going into the question itself it might be well to inquire what are the implications of reflection?

What do you take for granted? Many things. For example, you take it for granted that you exist; that the easy chair in which you repose is a real chair, also that the nearby radiator is sending out heat. Outside, it is cold and snowing. A few people are passing up and down the street. You do not imagine this external world exists. You believe that you *know* it exists. And yet advanced idealists like Fichte appear to be uncertain, not only about the existence of an external world, or of other men and women, but about their own existence. We have to be patient with these colossal doubters, even though they are so certain that nothing is certain.

Again, as you sit there, you take for granted that you are conscious without knowing what consciousness is, in itself. You are facing a difficult problem, yet you are unaware as to how a simple thought is originated and fled away in memory. You are seeking a new conception: but when you get it you do not know how it is

added to your present stock of ideas. . . . Further, as you reflect, the subconscious is constantly interposing. All that you have ever thought, seen or heard, is at your service, not at the call of will, but by some obscure power of association.

I refer to these matters here for two reasons: first, because the mysteries of mind, and their meaning as mysteries, tend to be overlooked. You would think from the reading of some of our modern psychologies that there is not a thing we do not know. I wish to show that thinking, in the complete sense, is not merely a logical process. It is one in which known and unknown elements play a part. I call it a *search*. Thinking is seeking: success is finding. But you do not seek by using reason only. You seek with the whole mind: imagination as well as analysis, feeling as well as logic, soul as well as sense.

## VI

To think is to perceive with the mind. The process is often long and difficult because so many obstacles have to be removed before the covered up truth can be made visible. A thinker works and *waits*. Read the brilliant account of some of Poincaré's mathematical discoveries in his *Science and Hypothesis*. Haven't we all of us, on a lower plane of investigation, experienced the coming of truth *like a flash of light*? We may have employed the scientific method, but that method has more in it than appears in the record. It is alleged to be the gathering together of facts, followed by analysis, classification, and correct inferences. Facts and logic only? No. The scientific method in action is the scientific method *plus*. It is the whole mind, known and unknown. Tyndall revered the method, but nobody knew better than he the importance of imagination as an agent in discovery. Every man of sense respects the method for what it is and what it has done, but it is not the method itself that gives us the truth. It is the mind of man—not a part of it but the whole of it.

## VII

So you tackle this problem of cause and effect in human actions. You wish to discover whether the laws of the moral world are as sure as the laws of Nature. What happens as you focus your mind on the subject? If you are to think correctly, you know that you must follow the scientific method. You gather material: you analyse it: you classify it: you reason about it. I shall assume that you have performed all the donkey work involved and that you are now intent upon reflection. Before the mind can see the truth, or the approximation of it, it has to clear away a number of obstacles due to prejudice, to false opinions, to errors in "facts."

What happens, therefore, is this: that your mind is in a rapid state of movement, darting hither and thither, analysing, judging, comparing, rejecting, and accepting. You think that you have a solution: then a strong objection appears and you turn to examine it and to answer it. Thus, whatever conflict there may be in a mental problem, your thinking is essentially an effort to perceive.

Suddenly there occurs to you a remark you once read in Emerson's essay on *Compensation*. He declared that "the world looks like a multiplication table or a mathematical equation, which, turn it how you will, balances itself. Take what figure you will, its exact value, no more nor less returns to you. Every secret is told, every crime is punished. Every virtue is rewarded, every wrong redressed, in silence and certainty." When you first became acquainted with that passage you no doubt said, "Well, well! Is not this the very world where the wicked prosper, where crimes go unpunished, where evils abound, and where injustice is rampant?" Emerson offended you. His optimism was not based on facts.

Besides, is not the moral incompleteness of this world a specific argument for another life where its wrongs will be righted? . . . Thus and thus, I imagine, you used to correct the excessive confidence of the sage. But you did not *reason*. You judged, and judged adversely.

## VIII

To-day you lay aside this antipathy. You inquire. Do we reap what we sow, always, inevitably? Does every man get what is coming to him? and every woman? be it good or evil? . . . You think long and carefully, for the answer is important. You suppose for argument's sake that it is possible to sow a definite evil, and, as a result, to reap a definite good. In that event there could be no true law of sowing and reaping. We should be able to gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles. A theft could bring happiness and prosperity, and a murder could confer a permanent advantage on the guilty party. . . .

But maybe you are not satisfied with this *reductio ad absurdum*. You believe, somehow, that not only do the guilty sometimes escape, but that the innocent sometimes suffer. In *appearance*, yes. But do they in *reality*? Remember you are dealing with the individual's own actions so far as they concern *himself*. You are trying to understand why a sage should be so confident that every wrong is righted. It can only be because he believed that moral laws are universally operative. . . . But *are* they? If they are, it follows as a consequence that we ourselves need not undertake the task of retribution. The laws—natural, civil, moral—will do that. Then you suddenly remember a warning. Christ said, "Resist not evil." It is as if the thought in His mind had been this: "Have faith in the moral constitution of the world. You need not be anxious about justice. It is in action here and now. A man reaps what he sows: that, and no more."

## IX

You ponder this thought. It gives you a feeling of assurance. You have always wanted to believe that wrong-doing was ultimately undoing. And yet you have doubts. . . . To break a physical law is to suffer instantly, although the final efforts may be delayed. To break a moral law would in many cases appear to entail



no immediate consequences. You then develop an uncomfortable feeling that the sinner may escape, as you have known some to do; at any rate they appear to have gone scot free.

But, as often happens, appearance may be deceptive. Retribution may be delayed, for "the mills of God grind slowly: but they grind exceeding small." You have made the acquaintance of people whose one and only misdemeanour was undetected, and yet the undisclosed secret was a perpetual moral torture. It would be a strange thing if Nature's laws were sure and the moral law uncertain. But there can be no gamble in ethics. That impression gathers force as you continue your reflection. Escape is impossible. "Thou wast a God that forgavest them although Thou tookest vengeance on them because of their iniquities."

Then another obstacle bars the way. You suddenly become aware of an old difficulty: the existence of good men and women whose lives are criss-crossed with injustices which are not due to their own actions, but to the actions of others. Yes, we reap other sowings than our own. But this applies to both good and evil. Advantage as well as disadvantage comes our way. We cannot keep the effects of right and wrong within the circle of our individual existence. How could that happen when the intricate weavings of all human affairs are taken into account? If your daughter's picture is hung in the Academy, you have your portion of the glory of it: and if your son goes to prison you bear some of the disgrace. We do not live unto ourselves or die unto ourselves. Admittedly, this consideration does no more than explain the *modus operandi* of the fact. It offers no explanation as to why some persons, some social groups, some nations are visited with greater sufferings than others.

You have always said that Belgium, as a country, had done nothing to deserve the tragedy of 1914, and that Switzerland had done nothing to merit an escape. The blame, if blame there be, lies in geographical

position. When Nature comes first, man takes a second place. And in one actual sense Nature always comes first.

## XI

Thus your thinking has been a perceiving. You have cleared away the debris so that the facts could be clearly seen. Isn't it always so? We have disputed much about the word personality as applied to the First Cause. We have heard words of derision, of doubt, and of certainty. You bend your mind to the task of solution. . . . Hard thinking follows. . . . But is not the problem one of those which words alone have confused and made difficult?

Dr. Matthews, in his *Studies in Christian Philosophy*, says, "It is not necessary to defend the thesis that God is a person. What we must defend is the proposition that God is personal." That is the thinking which dispels the mists and fogs of an overtaxed vocabulary. And Mr. F. H. Bradley, in his *Appearance and Reality*, gives the finale. "The absolute is not personal because it is more: it is superpersonal." And yet this progression of thought: person, personal, superpersonal is nothing that is new to the consciousness of a half illiterate peasant. He knew all the while that his God was superpersonal, but he could not express it.

There is a kind of truth for which we look in the depths, or in the heights, or at great distances, but it may not be far from each one of us. Why do we seek it where it is not to be found? Because the great spectacle of the phenomenal world dominates us, and because we have elected to set up Reason as the only guide to life. True, there come periods when the inner life of man presents demands which offset this attention claimed by the sciences. During such periods man rises above Nature, and spiritual truth is sought within rather than without. Recall the passage from Browning's *Paracelsus*:

Truth is within ourselves: it takes no rise  
From outward things, whate'er you may believe;  
There is an inward centre in us all  
Where truth abides in fullness.

Despite the marvels of psychological research no experimental method has been devised which will reveal this source of spiritual knowledge. And yet its one method *is* experimental. We enter the kingdom not with laboratory instruments but with the mind of a child. This has always been a hard saying.

## XII

Why should we become as little children? What do they know about logic and the scientific method? How can their untutored minds be a model for the seeker after truth? It sounds like foolishness, just as the gospel did to the Greeks. And yet is it not true that genius is the power of looking at life with the eyes of youth? or, as Barrie defines it, "the power to be again a boy at will." In a sense genius does not think strenuously: it looks—and knows. John Addington Symonds remarked of himself that "in proportion as I ceased to study systematically I learned to think and feel originally."

There is a mental directness about the child mind which is often startling in its simplicity and effectiveness. When you hear one of these effortless displays of acute penetration in a child of tender years you exclaim to yourself, "Well! I should never have thought of *that*." Why not? Because of the mass of information which stands in your way, and because of the tendencies of education and experience. These have given a bent to your mind, and you are thus far a product not a producer. The child has no such limitations. He, or she, goes straight as an arrow to the point: there are no obstructions in the way. The verdict comes from virgin intellect. . . . That, as I see it, is the secret of entering every kingdom of the Spirit.

## XIII

If a vast bulk of knowledge were the only means of admission into the kingdom, then truth would be the sole privilege of the encyclopædists. If, on the other hand, admission was by virtue of a superlatively trained intelli-

gence, then, again, truth would be the perquisite of the intellectual few. But neither knowledge in the mass nor mental acumen is the *via media*. Take the definitions of life by two men, both of whom were possessed of great knowledge and great ability. Schopenhauer said, "Life is a uselessly interrupting episode in the blissful repose of nothing." Gabriel Tarde, the French sociologist, quoted with apparent sympathy by Remy de Gourmont, said, "Life is the pursuit of the impossible through the useless." One ought to be supremely grateful for such deliverances as these. How else could one be sure that a trained mind does not always see the light? In what other way could we have a better confirmation of the failure of knowledge *per se*? . . . True, there are men in the front rank of writers who feel compelled to aim at brilliance first and last, and you may say that these two definitions of life bear the marks of conscious effort in that direction. They do not appeal to me in that way. They seem to be sincere. And they are inevitable if a man seeks for the whole truth outside himself, and with the use of reason as the sole instrument.

## XIV

Let us see how far we have come on the journey. We found that thinking was the hardest work in the world for three reasons: and these we briefly discussed. We found that thought had many implications and that its nature was not simple but complex. But thinking is *seeing* with the mind: although the thing sought for may not appear for a considerable time. It has to be uncovered, and this is often long and tedious work. We found, too, that this mental seeing demanded a use of the whole mind, not a section of it. The emotional as well as the intellectual should come into play, otherwise distorted views would result.

We analysed the case of Justice *versus* Injustice in human life: in other words the certainty or uncertainty of reaping what we sow. It was made clear that the moral law is supreme. We analysed the claim that truth is within ourselves. The result? "Audited and found correct." Entrance into every kingdom of the

spirit—a house of many mansions—is effected by a natural and instinctive effort of the understanding, typified by the mind of the child. It is the way of genius.

## XV

But although thinking is finally perceiving, yet in its varied activities it is sufficiently complex to satisfy the keenest psychological appetite. With these complexities I have no concern here. All I want to do is to harp on one string, and to succeed in striking its one note continuously. You now know what it is. Your mind is a collection of powers governed by a self. Don't allow that self to have any favourites. Let him use *all* his powers when he sits down to reflect, not pat Reason on the back and snub most of the others. And don't allow him to become artificial. You may never have genius, but you can follow its method—which is to look at life without presuppositions; to cross-examine it with your own questions, and form your own opinions from the answers received.

## XVI

The more prominent words calling for attention are these: phenomena, feeling, instinct, nothingness, syllogism, myth, tendency, capacity, Cro-Magnon, brain, privilege, day-dreaming, scientific method *plus*, effect, virtue, conflicts, compensation, sage, consequence, person, personal, superpersonal, truth, experimental, self, presuppositions, gravity, criticism.

There are terms in this list, as in all others, which are of real importance. *Phenomena* is a vital word in science and philosophy; *day-dreaming* is gradually accumulating a psychological literature of its own; *imagination* needs a thorough understanding in all its connotations. *Person*, especially, is a word that calls for careful investigation. Clear meanings lead to clear thinkings.

One final point: do not suppose that because you cannot imagine an idea that it is therefore wrong. You

cannot imagine how the brain is the agent of consciousness: but it is. This occasional failure of imagination will come up again for discussion.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

1. Looking back on your past life, what would you say has been the chief defect in your habits of reflection?
2. In a letter a student says, "I was well educated and taught to *prove* everything. I have tried to do so, but many things that seem to be true I can't prove. How am I to classify these things?" Write a brief answer to this letter.
3. Another student writes, "There are so many kinds of truth in the world that I have been led to wonder whether there is one big Truth which embraces them all." What would be your answer?
4. Is thought an end in itself or ought it to lead to action? Give reasons for your answer.
5. FIRST OLD MAN: What's the most wonderful thing you've found in your life?

SECOND OLD MAN: History.

FIRST OLD MAN: History? How's that?

SECOND OLD MAN: Because it was going on for ages before we were born, and it will be going on for ages after we're dead. History is the whole works.

FIRST OLD MAN: You mean the history of everything?

SECOND OLD MAN: Yes. It began at Creation and it must finish with the final.

FIRST OLD MAN (*sententiously*): But God has no history.

Comment on this dialogue.

6. Give reasons why you would agree or disagree with Bacon when he says in his *Novum Organum*: "In general let every student of Nature take this as a rule—that whatsoever his mind seizes upon and

dwells upon with peculiar satisfaction is to be held in suspicion." Have not many great discoveries been due to such suggestions, which instead of being held in suspicion were merged into originalities? Or did Bacon refer to something else? What things do you wish to be true that are not true?

7. At thirty years of age a man can look back on the days of childhood with some degree of mental detachment. He asks, "Am I the same self? larger as the body is larger? If larger, how does the self grow? As it is non-material, in what sense can it be represented by words used of physical size? Is "larger" synonymous with intensity and power? If not, what is it?"
8. Professor William James, in his review of Renan's *Dialogues*, refers to "that *esprit vulgaire*, Josh Billings," who says "that if you have \$80,000 at interest, and own the house you live in, it is not much trouble to be a philosopher." Analyse the popular idea, or ideas, of philosophy, appraising them closely as to their inaccuracy, their superficiality, and—the modicum of truth they contain.
9. "It is every man's duty to be dissatisfied with his lot. How else can he be ambitious?" Put this question through an examination. Here are some questions: Is dissatisfied the same as unsatisfied? Is an ambitious man a man with a grumble against his lot? How can discontent become a duty?
10. A barrister having been appointed to a judgeship in a Crown Colony was advised by Lord Mansfield to decide all cases according to common sense, but giving no reasons for his judgment. "Your judgment will probably be right, but your reasons will certainly be wrong." Analyse this statement fully.
11. It is often said that we cannot know that anything exists which we do not know. How would you answer this contention?
12. Comment on the following dialogue:  
 IDEALIST: I have now answered all your objections to the real existence of an external world. Have you any other?  
 REALIST: Yes. My dog believes that when he sees a rabbit it is a real rabbit in a real wood on real ground.

IDEALIST: That proves nothing, my friend. Your dog is merely a part of the external scene which I have already disposed of.

REALIST: But that rabbit believes my dog is a real dog, with real feet and real teeth, and he runs away with real fear.

IDEALIST: The rabbit is on the same plane as the dog: both are ideas.

REALIST: But when my dog bit you the other day was it merely an idea?

IDEALIST: I'm afraid you are an incorrigible.

REALIST: Then there are two of us.



## LETTER IV

### Interrogation and the Scientific Method

DEAR ROGER,

Thinking begins with curiosity and is expressed in forms of inquiry. We see an object; we put it on the witness stand: we cross-examine it: "What are you? How did you come to exist? and why? When did it happen? and how?"

We even put the Universe itself through the ordeal—without hesitation and with keen analysis. We follow the same method in dealing with the teeming varieties of problems offered by a complex existence. The design of the snow-flake, the "sports" of a garden geranium with completely white leaves, the theory that the Christian atonement was addressed to the Devil, and the persistency of the double negative in popular speech are specimens of thousands of others. We put each through a severe questioning: what? when? where? how? and why? Answers are forthcoming: some of them from perjured witnesses, some of them misleading, many of them true. And all the time we are mentally comparing one statement with another, facing one fact with its opposite: wondering, doubting, theorizing. This is ordered reflection: a serious attempt to arrive at the truth.

## II

Much depends on the skill of the cross-examiner. Let us suppose two men, with the same problems before them, begin a systematic inquiry. They apply determinedly the five words of interrogation, not in a prescribed order but as they come in natural sequence.

One of the inquiring minds, being of superior quality, obtains the better results. Concentration, persistence, level-headedness, care and industrious imagination lead to happy results. The other man is fanciful, and, although occasionally brilliant, is liable to go off at a tangent. He is also a trifle impatient and fails to follow up clues that are good.

It needs imagination to formulate good questions. That is why Watt and Stephenson, and all modern discoverers and inventors have achieved what seemed to be impossible. It explains progress in philosophy and the arts as well as in science. Kant's cross-examination of Hume resulted in the famous *Critiques*. If you know how to ask questions and compel answers, your own thinking will accomplish the results you aim at.

### III

Take the idea of progress just referred to. You presumed that everybody believed in progress until you read an article denying it *in toto*. You felt a little angered. "What! no such thing as progress! Absurd! The man must be a . . ." But wait. Here is a chance to think for yourself. Seize the word and interrogate it. . . . Get its etymology. Learn its history. When did the idea of progress appear? Was it with Vico? Had the Greeks no idea of it? What has Asia always believed about it? Is progress temporal or eternal? What is Nirvana? and Heaven? Are they limits or new opportunities? . . . Some of your questions will be unanswered: others will be answered in part: a few in full. But not until you have marshalled your own ideas will you turn to critical authorities.

If I show a tendency to harp on this individual attitude you must remember that it is what you requested in your first letter. Moreover, it is the very essence of reflection. To get all your ideas ready made is not thinking. It is *addition*. You lose the sense of paternity. You have not fathered a single thought. Some people adopt a group of thought-children, but they can never think of them as a father does of his own.

## IV

One of the aims of cross-examination is to arrive at the Truth: another aim is to define it. Hence the Socratic method. Definition sets up boundaries; it isolates an idea or a thing from similar ideas or things, and thus gives all the advantages of clarity. The boundary line may be a complete circle; or it may be a perpendicular which separates a notion from a neighbouring notion; or it may be no line at all, in which case the blank space represents the indefinite or the infinite. . . .

This question of boundaries has thus a philosophical as well as a literary aspect. The longer I live the more certain I feel that boundaries are an appearance, not a reality. Where is the boundary line between mind and body, between consciousness and subconsciousness, between the organic and the inorganic, between life and death? All existence would seem to be a unity, at last, with God as All in All. . . . Perhaps you hesitate to follow me here. Good. Subject every statement I make to rigid scrutiny. You do not like to think there is no boundary between the organic and the inorganic; in fact, you believe that because no science has ever discovered it, there must be a tremendous gap between the living and the non-living. There are differences, yes. But instead of compelling Nature to submit to our vocabulary, would it not be wiser to make our vocabulary submit to Nature? Is not everything alive in some sense? Would you say that atoms and molecules are *dead*? and that in spite of their movements they belong to the non-living?

Take the matter of intelligence. Between the amœba and the brain of Einstein there is a whole universe of difference, for the amœba's only evidence of *mind* is an ability to select the right food. Even that ability is, strictly speaking, an automatism; indeed, as intelligence, it is not equal to that of the Venus fly-trap, which allegedly belongs to a lower group of phenomena.

## V

We may have to change our views of what life is, and this would change the nature of the problem regarding its origin. Up to the present all investigation has been confined to the material side of things. Life's beginnings have been sought in matter alone. Yet life is matter *plus*. Pan-psychism declares that everything is living. Maybe so. But what is the difference between life in a pebble of granite and life in a lily; and between life in a telegraph plant and in a bee? Is it mere graduation? Does intelligence appear as an orderly development in the unfolding of Nature? Not always. There are gaps. Is there now, or has there been, a kind of external activity at work—life germs from other planets, or a spiritual activity which passes our ken? We do not know. But no experiment has proved that life comes from non-living life; there is an unbridged gulf between life and death as understood by natural science. Creative force is never absent in the sense that the world is left to its fate. There is an apparent end of Nature's originalities. She has reached a limit. But there may be an epoch ahead in which some combination of agencies will develop an altogether new regime. Why not?

Emergence—that idea which says there may be and probably is a creative power in the *active association* of certain forces, a power which these forces do not possess when unassociated—is a deeply suggestive doctrine. It is not readily accepted by men of science, for it is opposed to the explanation of the complex by the simple. And yet, why should it be untrue because it does not agree with our ideas of truth?

## VI

You may be wondering why I have not discussed the scientific method first. For this reason: that the average man gets more value out of the practice of cross-examining his facts. Besides, men in business use the scientific method without knowing it. The marketing of a new product is nowadays a consistent procedure in which all

the data are assembled and classified, then synthetically treated; that is, right inferences are drawn. For, after all, the method of science is simple in itself. There is nothing occult about it. The gathering of the material, the orderly arranging of it, and the attainment of logical conclusions—this, in brief, is the method. . . . Of course, its application is a different matter. Difficulties appear immediately.

For instance, we are obliged to collect all the facts. All? Well, all the associated facts. In many cases this is possible, and natural science can be to some extent dogmatic, for its conclusions would appear to be invulnerable. But if I were to affirm that human intelligence is the highest in the Universe, I should not be guilty of a truly scientific judgment. I do not know all the intelligences of the Universe. Nor does anybody else. There may be intelligences on other planets, or in other solar systems, older and more developed than ours. There is also the supreme creative intelligence: and the possibility of other intelligences between that and our own.

Classification presents other difficulties. On the surface it is easy, and we proceed with confidence in its larger divisions. But the boundary lines eventually become indistinct, and physical facts are indistinguishable from mental facts. The material and the spiritual seem to coalesce. All existence, finally, takes on the appearance of an emanation or an unfolding. The visible slides into the invisible.

The drawing of right conclusions is the essence of the whole process. Naturally, it is the sphere where most mistakes have been made. These mistakes are human and instructive. Some of Aristotle's guesses, or theories, are amusing in the light of modern science, but nobody thinks lightly of him because his inferences were occasionally inaccurate. He was too fine an observer, and too comprehensive a thinker, to lose the respect of any inquirers into truth. But the errors of investigators in more recent times might be expected to produce less dogmatism. Unfortunately, this is not so. Men who confess they have not the least idea how the oak is contained in the acorn, or how the spermatozoa evolve into a separate individual, are prepared to speak *ex cathedra* that materialism is proved! Well! Well!

## VII

The fact that there are ideas which refuse to be encircled within the borders of a complete definition is important: it tells us that *we can know what we cannot define*. Natural science interrogates the external world and insists on exactitude, on measurement, on certainty, and on proofs. But an interrogation of the inner life produces different results: we get the inexact, the indefinable, the vague, and the impalpable. Yet these are none the less real. In truth, the reality of conscious experience is the greatest of all realities, and carries with it the soundest of all certainties. This brings me to what I will call "Interrogation and the Mystic Method."

I am not prepared to support all the claims of mysticism. I have found that this search for direct knowledge brings results that are discordant and unsatisfactory, although they appear to be acceptable to the mystic himself. There is no doubt a series of elementary experiences common to all who seek truth in this way, but in its more advanced stages, such as recalling the details of a previous earth career, there is no criterion by which to distinguish truth from error. The possibilities of self-deception are numerous.

What I have in mind when I speak of a mystic method is the skilful appeal to inward experience—not the mysticism of divorcing soul from body for a temporary period and investigating phenomena of an occult nature. This may or may not be possible. I cannot say. But it is far removed from the natural mysticism of the heart. When Sophocles said that Æschylus did right without knowing it, he was stating a fact not discoverable by the method of science; for science works and gets results by methodical discovery, whereas mysticism offers us immediacies. Personally, I see no quarrel between logic and intuition. They supplement each other; indeed, the scientific method employs powers of mind which are not supposed to be included in its activities: and the occasionally despised intuitive method has more logic in it than one might suspect. The whole mind, sooner or later, has its say, whatever method of seeking truth we employ.

## VIII

I will try to be explicit. Let any man, even an ultra-rationalist, study his inner life, and he is bound to become conscious of what may truthfully be called planes of being. In other words, consciousness has its levels. They stretch out to the universal, or narrow down to the particular. Sometimes pure thought effects the change. More often it is the function of feeling. . . . Take the influence of music on the flow of ideas. I refer, of course, to good music; not to the music which simply oscillates the nervous system. The higher music induces the higher perceptions. There are ideas without words just as there are songs without words. The plane of consciousness being raised, the hearer has emotional responses which he cannot express. For the moment he lives in a new world; at any rate that is the feeling. If his mind reverts to some commonplace matter, the lowly thing becomes possessed of an aura. If he should contemplate love, beauty, immortality, these assume new meaning and power. . . . After repeated experiences of this nature he finds that he has unconsciously summarized and systematized his impressions. They form a body of mental and moral values. In short they are a permanent contribution to his spiritual life.

But music is only one of the agencies which change the level of the soul. There is Nature in its picturesque moods. There is the pain—and suffering—of bodily affliction. There is death—and disappearance. There is the tragedy that suddenly falls athwart our daily course. Nor can we omit the coming of an intellectual renaissance, or some unexpected but terrific reversal of fortune. All these approach us more or less from facts or events that are external. I wish I had space to show how they build up character and create the criteria of judgment.

But does Reason play the leading rôle in such experiences? Decidedly not. Very often, indeed, it is speechless. Not by chance were Job's comforters silent, for great grief is beyond words and logic. Similarly, inner experience is beyond the province of Reason to explain. That is why the materialist says life is meaningless. It is—in the eyes of pure intellect. But it was never

intended that we should put our spiritual powers in irons and judge the world with manacled minds. Let every faculty play its natural part, and life becomes a process we can accept with understanding.

## IX

The levels of the inner life are raised or lowered by its own activities, apart from external influences. Analyse that self of yours, intelligently, impartially, and without morbid feelings. What happens? You ask many questions. Does this self remain the same through the passage of years? If the body changes periodically, why not the soul also? . . . You remember this self at sixteen, and, although now richer and fuller at thirty, it is evidently unchanged essentially. What then is this enrichment and enlargement which has taken place? Is it what we call growth? If so, how does it inhere in brain and heart? You think . . . and you think . . . and you think again: only to discover that the union of body and soul is mystical. I do not mean mysterious. I mean that the mode of knowledge in this matter is direct, and of the spirit; not a knowledge we get by the scientific method. In like manner all inner experience is mystical. The transitions and mutations of thought and feeling and will are not untraceable, otherwise psychology would be impossible; but their form of activity is such that we can say no more than that we are aware of them. They are ours, yet we do not know how. . . .

I will summarize this letter in a few sentences. If you would possess abundant material for reflection, cross-examine the facts that appeal to you as interesting. Riddle these facts with questions. Demand answers. But be patient.

The facts of the outer world of Nature are handled by the scientific method. The facts of the inner world would follow the mystic method. They can do no other. But cross-examination is the secret of both methods. . . . Do not allow yourself to be hurried in your conclusions



because you find so-called contradictions between the results of the two methods. But give the preference to soul, for that is supreme.

Cordially yours,

*Word List:* Varieties, Nirvana, progress, organic, inorganic, automatism, life, death, pan-psychism, emergence, mysticism, renaissance.

### Questions and Problems

1. Here is a lily of the valley. Draw up a series of questions about its origin, its habitat, its beauty, its fragrance, and its place in literature.
2. Endeavour to answer the following questions about the soul of man, soul being understood as the personal self:
  - (a) What are the theories of theologians, past and present, as to the origin of the soul?
  - (b) Of Creationism, Traducianism, and Reincarnation, which theory appeals to you as true?
  - (c) What function does memory serve in the continuity of the soul?
  - (d) If brain-cells change, periodically, how is memory continued inviolate?
  - (e) If, as Hering says, memory is a function of all organic matter, why should spirit not have its enduring memory also?
3. "Our books approach very slowly the things we wish to know," said Emerson in his essay on *Beauty*. Put this statement through a severe cross-examination. First draw up a list of the things we wish to know, then test the modern literary output as to the truth or error of authors' shortcomings in this respect.
4. "Inasmuch as a law may be absolutely immoral, although entered on the Statute Book and enforced, I claim the right to disobey such law and to suffer the consequences."
  - (a) What cases could you offer in support?
  - (b) Is the reasoning sound or unsound?
  - (c) Is the stand taken moral or immoral? Why?

5. A mathematician, on being asked how many times in a hundred a coin tossed into the air would fall heads and tails, gave the required figures. A thrower then tossed a coin which fell "heads" eleven times out of twelve. He next caused the coin to drop "tails" nineteen times out of twenty. The mathematician's estimates were wrong. But was the general law of probability broken by expert ability? If so, how? Cross-examine the word *probability* and its fundamental idea.
6. Draw up a list of your unanswered questions on the problems of existence. Arrange them according to classes. Compare them in order to discover what they have in common, and whether in this way the difficulty of one opens out a way for an answer to another.
7. "It would not be easy even for an unbeliever to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve of our life." (John Stuart Mill, in *Three Essays on Religion*.) Write down a list of questions in sequential order which Mill might have asked himself, and which led to this definite pronouncement on the moral authority of Jesus.

## LETTER V

### What is a Fact?

DEAR ROGER,

I once asked a friend how he would define a fact, and he said, "A fact is something that everybody agrees is true." You could soon riddle that definition with shots, for there are many facts which numerous people deny. But when in answer to my request for a specimen fact he answered, "My own existence," I thought that was as good as any he could have selected—as an echo of Descartes, with his "I think, therefore I am." Of course, a carping critic could say that my friend was mistaken, and that what he called his existence was pure illusion. Yet even existence is a fact—as an illusion. A patient in a lunatic asylum anywhere may say, "I am Napoleon." We know he is not, but it is a fact that he thinks he is.

In this letter I wish to offer some considerations that may enable you to answer the question I have asked, and to show the importance of the subject as a basis of clear thinking. The word *fact* has never been an easy one for lexicographers, although words like "to" will give them more trouble. "Anything that is done or comes to pass" is one definition of fact. "Anything regarded as actually existent, whether it be an object, event, condition, or relation, and whether material or mental" is another. You may not be completely satisfied by either, so try to form a definition of your own. Later, you may come round to the opinion of Rastus, who, after much cogitation, declared "a fac's a fac'—'tain't nothing else but."

## II

Some facts are easy enough: that is, they are never questioned because their existence is fully established. Nobody denies that the earth goes round the sun, that Edinburgh is in Scotland, that the Great War began in 1914, and that the Kaiser went into Holland. But as soon as you say, "Is it not a fact that . . ." then argument begins; for what is an undoubted fact in your mind may be an egregious error to your neighbour. Here is an illustration.

Is it a fact that, as Professor H. E. Barnes affirms (*American Mercury*, January 1926), "competent historians of this period are almost unanimously agreed that if the Constitution had been submitted to a plebiscite of all the adult males of the country it would have been overwhelmingly rejected." The only way to test an alleged fact is to marshal the evidence for it. In this case we should have to collect the testimonies of competent historians, assuming that there would be no quarrel about their number, then analyse their testimonies and discover how far they were unanimous on the point in question. If they were almost unanimous, Professor Barnes has made an exact statement. If they were not, then an inexact estimate has been offered, and we should have to arrive at some method of gauging the extent of their support. Provisionally, however, we shall accept this "almost unanimous." There is the fact, then, that competent historians believed the American constitution would have been overwhelmingly rejected by the male voters of the States in 1776. But would those voters have rejected it? It is a fact that informed opinion is divided on the issue, but is it a fact that the rejection would have been overwhelming? Manifestly, nobody can say with absolute certainty what would have happened *if* . . . ? but there is a state of mind called high probability; and if those scholars who have studied the Revolution period intimately, its people, its conditions, its mentality, are convinced that the Constitution would have been rejected by all male voters, their opinions in aggregate amount to moral certainty; and between that and a fact there is not a vast amount of difference.

## III

Facts about humanity are not "easy," for life is very involved. Its complexities are such that you can often say yes and no to the same question and yet be in the right. Harold Frederic said of the Irish people that "they are the merriest and the saddest; the most talented and the most unproductive; the most practical and the most visionary; the most devout and the most pagan." What is this but an effort on the part of an American novelist to state a complex fact about national character?

General Harbord has a similar deliverance about the French. "The French are the most delightful, exasperating, unreliable, trustworthy, sensitive, insanitary, cleanly, dirty, artistic, clever, and stupid people that the writer has ever known. . . . But they are our Allies, God bless 'em." If a foreigner ventures to describe America, does he not begin by saying that it is a land of contradictions? Every country is—to the foreigner. National character is a fact, but what a fact! If it had been better understood there would have been no Great War.

I referred a moment ago to *evidence*. This is one of those words which are constantly rising in value. As knowledge increases, reasoning both as a science and an art becomes more intricate because of the multiplication of factors; consequently evidence takes on a greater complexity and demands closer attention. It is defined as "the establishment of a fact or of a truth by other truths." A fact is not an opinion, an estimate, a conjecture, an argument, a statement; it is *evidenced*. It has confirmation, testimony, proof.

## IV

If you have never compared the laws of evidence in history, science, and legal trials, you have before you a very absorbing study. The man of science has evidence by experiment which can be repeated for the satisfaction of others. The historian, in order to prove the date of an Egyptian temple, may begin tentatively by saying

that Sacros, a Greek traveller, scratched his name on one of the pillars, adding the date; therefore, the temple was in existence in that specified year. Little by little other evidence is added until finally the proof is complete that the building was erected one hundred years before Sacros visited it. . . . Legal evidence, again, is an entirely different sphere, with several divisions and subdivisions, yet obeying the rules which in every department of knowledge are needed to establish a fact.

"What is the evidence?" is a question you will often ask if you are wise. And you will not be too ready to say that there is no evidence at all if it should chance to be absent. There is such a thing as evidence that evidence has not been sought for, and not found.

How many kinds of facts are there? We may roughly divide them into two classes; external and internal—facts which concern the mind and inner experience, and facts which concern persons and things outside us. Of course, a street-car accident, which we witness, is both an external and an internal fact, yet we cannot affirm that purely external facts do not exist. There are happenings on other great planets as well as on the earth, which never come within range of our consciousness. All experiences are mental, and all facts are, for that reason, mental in their realization; but numerous external facts exist which are completely beyond our ken. . . .

Known facts of natural science are that the ichthyosaurus has disappeared, that like produces like, and that the sun will rise to-morrow morning. The first is a fact of the past, the second is a fact for all time, and the third is a fact of the immediate future. Proofs? There is geological evidence that the big animal did once exist, and no living specimens have ever been found. Like has produced like from the days of creation, but we have to accept the presence of variations, some of which have brought advantages to the race. Like from like is the basis of certainty for all growers, and no grower ever yet found an apple tree that produced strawberries. . . . The sun will rise to-morrow morning provided nothing

happens to interfere. That anything will happen is ten trillions to one. Hence the *fact*. It is founded on the uniformity of nature.

But the facts of the inner life have for us a superiority which is not difficult to understand or to accept. They are so near to us that they form part of us. When the negro wrote to his sweetheart saying, "My feelings is *me*," he was only stating the bare truth. The facts of consciousness are supreme because in a sense they are constituents of the ego. I exist, I feel, I know, I hope, are items of experience into which no doubt of their reality ever enters. Both mind and soul are bound up in them. If you say "a thing cannot both be and not be," you have stated a law of thought—a fact of the life of the intellect. If you say, "hope deferred maketh the heart sick," you have stated a law of emotional life. As such they carry an import which many external facts do not. Without the light and heat of the sun life on this planet would be impossible; yet the sun's existence is of comparatively small account when the mind is elated with victory or the soul bowed down with grief. Nay, this is true on the normal levels of everyday life.

Why do I stress this difference between the facts of the mind and the outer life? Because many materialistic authorities feel a natural compulsion to place the stress on the visible factors. That is why, to them, consciousness itself becomes an epi-phenomenon; why thought is a product of the brain as bile is of the liver; why an explanation of all the marvels of memory is sought in the action of brain-cells; and why the finer aspirations of the soul are looked upon as rank superstitions. Unless you give the supremacy to the facts of the inner life, it will be given to those of the outer life; at any rate, the visible will take the lead, and the invisible things of the spirit must dance to a tune with which it has little sympathy.

## VI

Let us take another aspect of the same subject; *knowledge values*. Of these self-knowledge occupies the pre-eminency. Body and soul come first. Physiology, psychology, and ethics are regarded as separate sciences.

They may be so treated for purposes of convenience, but in reality, which means in their practical issues, they are a unity. No man can live twenty-four hours without having to consider the laws of each, not once, but many times. And seldom as entirely separate entities. If the mind plots a crime, the body must carry it out. Discovery entails punishment—which is physical, mental and moral. . . . The old oracle, "Know thyself," is still an oracle, despite ten thousand repetitions. Facts about the life of the self are the facts which should be known before all others; indeed, fact-values go by distance. The fact that a star in the depths of space has split in two is as nothing compared with the fact that to-morrow morning you begin an examination which if fortunate will materially increase your income. It is more important that you should know your own body and mind than that you should understand the physiology and psychology of early man. An acquaintance with the life that surrounds you is more serviceable than a knowledge of the social life of Athens and Corinth. From the near to the remote is the method by which we judge of the immediate serviceability of facts.

## VII

I suppose I cannot close this letter without some reference to *illusions*. When you have detected the difference between a delusion and an illusion, you may still be uncertain as to the relation of both words to the word fact. The real contrast, however, is between illusion and knowledge, or perhaps between imagination and reality. Lecky has said that we gain more from our illusions than from our knowledge. If so, it means that there is more inspiration in faith than in the facts of Nature, not that a palpably mistaken notion leads us into more happiness than an observance of scientific laws. Truth is always superior to error, but our short-sightedness sometimes causes us to confuse the two, or rather we get the half truth for the whole truth, and the half error for the complete error, and of course our calculations are wrong.

A walk down Cheapside, London, is certain to be of



interest; it has historic associations as well as present-day reality. But let Wordsworth create the illusion for us:

At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears  
Hangs a thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years:  
Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard  
In the silence of morning the song of the Bird.

'Tis a note of enchantment; what ails her? She sees  
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees;  
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,  
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

She looks, and her heart is in heaven: but they fade,  
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade:  
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,  
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes.

This is truth to imagination. As such it is spiritual fact of the highest order. Illusion has justified itself.

Again: you claim that you have found no chemist, or psychologist, who admits the reality of Mrs. Eddy's doctrine of *chemicalization*. Possibly so. I agree with the chemists and psychologists. But if believing in chemicalization will cause people to believe less in matter and more in spirit, I shall to that extent welcome the illusion. The chances are that it will do more good than the illusion that the soul is nothing more than a passing phenomenon of brain-cells in a state of super-activity.

### VIII

What are the facts? is a vital question to every man who is seeking a philosophy of life. On many subjects he can obtain a satisfying answer. On others he cannot. He must proceed on the assumption that certain statements are true. But certainty is obtainable in the most important spheres of thought, and some of them have already been considered in these letters. The evidence is convincing.

As for illusion—the word itself must be understood in its various uses and applications; indeed, the chief words of this letter are capable of causing erroneous views unless care is taken to obtain exact meanings.

Words like fact, evidence, confirmation, testimony, proof, like from like, and epi-phenomenon go to the root of ideas and offer many possibilities of confusion.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

1. "It was an American Senator who declared that he had devoted a couple of weeks to the study of finance and found the accepted authorities all wrong. It was another American Senator who, confronted with certain hostile facts in the history of another country, proposed 'to brush away all facts and argue the question on considerations of plain common sense.'"  
(Ambrose Bierce in *A Cynic Looks at Life*.) If these statements are facts ought they not to be substantiated by evidence? Analyse the state of mind of the second Senator. On the face of it did he object to the facts? or to the interpretation of them?
2. "Pascal says that an inch added to the length of Cleopatra's nose would have changed the fortune of the world. But having said this he has said nothing, for all the forces of Nature and all the power of dynamite could not have added an inch to Cleopatra's nose." (Ambrose Bierce in *A Cynic Looks at Life*.) What did Pascal really mean? And of what value is Bierce's criticism?
3. "Historical certainty is, after all, only high probability. It is not equal to mathematical certainty, or to the certainties of conscious experiences. Doubt is easily insinuated into historical events, not at all into other spheres mentioned." Estimate the certainty for the existence of Plato with the certainty that  $2+2=4$ , and with the certainty that you are alive.

## LETTER VI

### Words! Words! Words!

DEAR ROGER,

You know the witty remark of the Frenchman: "Words were given us to conceal thought." They conceal it too often. That is why I have already urged the importance of word study. If debaters would first define their terms, many of their alleged differences would prove to be unreal. Thus, when two men publicly discuss "Has human life a meaning?" the obvious thing is to elucidate the contents of the word *meaning*. "Is the Bible inspired?" is a question which cannot be answered intelligently until the concept of inspiration is made indubitably clear. Men holding all sorts of divergent creeds have said that Christ was *divine*, but their ideas of divinity are as divergent as they are numerous.

Words, words, words!

Well might Dr. Johnson say, "I am not yet so lost in lexicography as to forget that words are the daughters of earth, and that things are the sons of heaven."

Words and things!

Things are too big for words, although words are wonderful things. I dare say you have discussed the question, "Can we think without words?" We may use words unconsciously during reflection, but how often do we say, "I have the idea but cannot put it into language"? This inadequacy of speech seems to have more significance for me than for some of my friends. For instance, there are no words for what I call *half-ideas*. I give them that name because they are feelings rather than thoughts. I sometimes receive them when I hear certain musical compositions—as if some message came from a far-off world—wordless and elusive, yet real. I am not referring to the ecstasy of the holy man, or to

St. Paul's third heaven where words are heard which it is not lawful to utter. Of these I know nothing. I refer to the thought contents of moods which one's vocabulary is impotent to embody; to the sense of union with Nature which is too subtle for language; or to the definite impression of some great tragedy that chills the heart and renders our vaunted philosophy speechless. Are not these to be included among the realities of experience? Do they mean nothing at all in the scheme of things? Are they merely bubbles on the surface of the psychological sea? or are they the evidences of spiritual vision?

I believe that the soul has glimpses of truth that come in direct flashes of perception; and that because nearly all people have these experiences, in some degree, they are always more ready to affirm than to deny the spiritual side of life. For there is nothing abnormal in the kind of consciousness I have briefly described. It is vastly different, for instance, from the conditions expounded by Sir J. Crichton Browne in his *Dreamy Mental States*. It is not the cosmic emotion of the Pantheist, nor is it identical with the vision of the past. It is rather a sudden feeling of the greatness and mystery of existence: the sense of nearness to a reservoir of infinite power: the deep impression of a Good that is changeless and which speaks to us in every living thing. . . . I write lamely of these emotionalized concepts, but my point is that we have no words for them, and that the experience of even average men and women is too deep for complete incarnation in speech. There is, I believe, a spiritual exaltation which one prefers should not be embodied in words: it would suffer depreciation. There are other experiences which we translate into language, but seldom into speech. These facts have several implications. I leave them for your industrious research.

## II

Have you noticed how many books have appeared within recent years on questions which one would have thought had been settled long ago? I do not mean popular issues, political or economic, but the more vital

problems of life and thought. Here are a few entries: *What is Christianity?* asks Adolf Harnack. *What is Art?* asks Leo Tolstoy. *What is History?* asks Karl Lamprecht. *What is Civilization?* asks Maeterlinck in a volume edited by Hendrik Van Loon. There is a long list of such volumes: a newspaper man asks *What is News?* a critic asks *What is English?* and an idealist asks *What is Spirituality?* Can it be that at this late date we are really ignorant of these things? After two thousand years of Christianity are we still doubtful about its nature or destiny? Art has been practised for untold ages: have we still to learn its primary aims and methods? History has been investigated and written for hundreds of years: are we still ignorant of its bases or doubtful about its lessons?

The fact is that opinion on vital matters is ever widening, and language is unable to keep pace with the increasing complexity of thought. Shakespeare says in his *Twelfth Night*, "words are grown so false I am loath to prove reason with them." A modern Babel is here: but it is the confusion of terms. For instance, *mind* and *body* appear to be changing places. With some people the body is an illusion and mind is the reality; with others the reality is the body, and mind merely a form of its behaviour. Words are losing their boundaries all the time. Right, truth, sin, immortality, God, genius, self-determination, democracy, and many others have suffered such wear and tear that their one-time meanings are no longer precise. What the life of a word is I do not know. There are no actuaries among lexicographers who have drawn up tables of word mortality for our guidance. I believe, however, that our demands on the longevity of some terms are excessive. The names of concrete objects may stand unchanged for centuries; but the words which convey abstract notions, or which cover those borderland experiences between the objective and the subjective, are bound to become more or less ineffective with the passage of time.

### III

The word immortality cannot be used intelligently unless we say at the time what the word means to us.

Four men—perhaps more—could say, “I believe in immortality,” and yet each belief would be different from the other three. How can we remedy this defect? Shall we say that there is immortality<sup>a</sup>, immortality<sup>b</sup>, immortality<sup>c</sup>, and immortality<sup>d</sup>? The first stands for life which endures without end; the second for survival after death, but postulates no more than that; the third represents the permanent influence of genius, or example; the fourth stands for an imperishable name, whether good or evil. And this is only one of many words for which mathematical signs could be used with advantage. We may have to use them. If not, we shall have to invent new words.

You referred in your second letter to “learned confusions.” I think I know what you mean. I, too, am of opinion that philosophers often become too abstract and lose themselves in the mists of Don’t-know-where. But avoid the notion that they are wilfully abstruse, and that they love profundity for its own sake. A few have been human in this fashion; possibly they will always have imitators: but the majority are truth-seekers. . . . You referred to the complexity of the word *meaning*. True, but thinkers do not try to make it more difficult than it really is. They aim at clarity, as Victoria Welby did in her *What is Meaning?* So did Ogden and Richards in their *Meaning of Meaning*. If some metaphysical professor goes one better and writes a tome on *The Meaning of the Meaning of Meaning*, it will not be an effort at humour—not by any chance—but a sober effort to elucidate ideas. I do not say the effort will be successful, indeed I fear we are becoming altogether too abstract.

Philosophy does not exist for itself. Its first function is interpretation and its last is service. The embodiment of a fact in a highly technical phrase changes nothing. For instance, when you come to see me, as you have promised to do, we shall discuss many things under the shade of the Oleander trees. But if, as Fullerton says, we were to call this communion “inter-subjective intercourse,” we do not know any more about the manner in which two consciousnesses compare ideas. And the physical and mental facts remain the same as before. Our idealisms and realisms, our theisms and atheisms have no effect on the Universe itself.

## IV

Take some of the words most used in philosophy: knowledge, appearance, law, reality, beauty, right, matter, form, idealism, time, space, cause. You know that around some of these words the great battles of philosophy have been fought. They are great battles because of the length of time they lasted, the amount of learning put into them, and the intense subtlety of their strategy and tactics. The fighting was never bloody, for philosophers are supposed to be free from animus, as well as from the delusion that a personal victory is a victory for the truth. Whatever you may think of those who have propounded doctrines which appear to you false, perhaps dangerous, no group of philosophers has ever sent a heretic to the stake, or put him to death for his opinions.

Around appearance and reality, as terms expressing two different ideas, has been fought the battle of idealism and realism. The plain man who kicks the clod of earth and says, "That's real enough for me," does not see why there should be a battle at all. In point of fact he may be nearer the solution than any idealist would allow. But when matter is investigated it is astonishing, to the candid but hitherto unreflective mind, that so much can be said in favour of the theory that the external world does not exist in the actual manner we have always supposed. My fountain-pen, with which I write, has reality, but this reality is not what it appears to be. It appears to be made up of hard compact materials, with a hollow space forming an ink reservoir, and a pen point for lettering. In reality, according to science, there are spaces in this solid matter in which molecules move about with rapidity, and at distances from each other that are quite appreciable. These molecules and movements we do not see, and my pen is, therefore, not what I thought it was, or rather it is a great deal more than I had imagined it to be. In other words *appearance* is not the same as *reality*.

Now this discovery makes no practical difference to me. My penmanship is no better for the knowledge I

receive about the molecules and atoms of my pen; and if an idealist favours me with a call he refers to my pen as if it were what it appeared to be. In fact, that is how we treat the whole world of phenomena: we accept appearances as if they were real—the railroad train, the store, the stock exchange, our houses, our gardens, our golf—knowing the while that the underlying reality may be vastly different. But it would be a boon if we had terms which would set forth accurately what we mean and what we do not mean, instead of having two words with confusing connotations. You will struggle with them patiently, sometimes inclining to this interpretation, sometimes to that: but there is one reality which you will most likely never give up, and that is the reality of experience. The external world may be *maya*, illusion, but, as a world, it is real to experience: its storms, its seasons, its earthquakes, and its yearly journey round the sun. If human life itself is eventually *maya*, it is also actual to our consciousness: its tragedies, its comedies, its hopes and its fears. What can be more real than mental pain? . . .

And there is a final fact: the enigma of existence is beyond our powers of solution. That is why philosophers land themselves in dilemmas. Doubt can be carried to a point where it becomes irrational; and reality can be denied to such a degree that the denier denies his own existence, and then denies that he denies it.

At first you may almost decide that idealism—which regards existence of every kind as mental only—is quite untenable. But wait and see. . . . Matter and spirit are not enemies. They combine to form man, and he is not out of love with himself on that account. Quite the reverse. True, we have called matter by lowly names, and we have dubbed our bodies as bestial: but we are becoming better mannered as we know more about them. Even inorganic substances are daily assuming a more marvellous content due to laboratory experiments: indeed the scientist in his research into matter has reached the invisible. His reports are really news from the world of the unseen. Perhaps he, not the man who probes into psychic manifestations, will be the one who will prove that the Unseen is identical with the Eternal, and that the Ideal lies behind the Real.



## VI

*Knowledge* is another of the important words of philosophy. Do we know the external world *directly* or do we *infer* its existence? That is a specimen problem. If you love philosophy you will discuss the problem avidly: if you are keen only on the dynamics in ideas these abstract investigations will have no interest for you.

You look out of the window and see a Rolls Royce car parked on the other side of the street. Let us try to discover what is involved in this observation. First, you have used your eyes to see. What is this *seeing*? The eye does not see. The mind, through the medium of the optic nerve, does the seeing. How is it done? Ah! mystery. Nobody knows how an objective fact is subjectively realized. The more we consider the problem of simple vision the more miraculous it becomes. . . . Then, what is it in us that *knows*? Is there a knower? Yes, the conscious self. How does that self use the organs of sense to see and to know? More mystery. This indeed may be called the one issue of philosophy, considered as mental science.

The first thing to remember in discussing knowledge is that knowledge must be taken for granted. If an idealist and a realist, arguing their respective creeds, agree that the Rolls Royce is parked on the opposite side of the street, they may proceed. But if either of them should deny that it is there, the discussion is temporarily held up. And how can one of the disputants *prove* to the other that the car is actually there? . . . You see this—that philosophy in its higher—or is it its lower?—reaches, is like chess. You make a statement, or a move, then your opponent replies; another statement, another move. But victory in the end is not necessarily the truth. It may mean that one philosopher is not a dialectician and that the other is a master of the art.

Knowledge, as I said a moment ago, is one of the most important words in the language. Think of the various degrees of knowledge which can be represented by the words "I know." For instance, "I know I have a toothache." This knowledge is personal, direct, and immediate. The pain is in me, and its intensity leaves

me in no doubt. Again, "I know you have a toothache." You told me so, and your appearance and actions confirm it. This is knowledge from *testimony* and *observation*. Still again, "I know that other people in this city are suffering from toothache." They did not tell me they were, but out of the millions who live in the city's limits there must be a large number in dental trouble. This is knowledge in the form of a *possibility* that amounts to *moral certainty*. You can trace other aspects of knowledge for yourself, not forgetting the knowledge of God and of spiritual laws.

## VII

Herbert Spencer asked: "What knowledge is of most worth?" and he answered, "*Science*." What is *your* answer? *Think for yourself*. Discover the supreme values. Evidently mere bulk does not count. If you knew ten languages and ten literatures: five natural sciences and their ramifications: the economical conditions of two continents and the political affairs of the planet, you would be a paragon of knowledge. To put it arithmetically, you might have a million facts and ideas, but would you be necessarily superior to a man who had but a fraction of your mental wealth? In mental wealth, yes: but otherwise? Was not Scaliger one of the most erudite men the world has known? Yet erudition and wisdom did not always go together in his life any more than they did in the life of Bacon.

Of the conditions suggested in the words, *being*, *doing*, and *having*, the third is perhaps the least significant. The most important question is not, What knowledge have you? although some forms of knowledge have great worth. It is not, What have you done? although right action and serviceable deeds have an approach to supremacy. It is, What are you in yourself? The emphasis is on this ideal self: what the New Testament calls being "rich towards God."

What we do not know, and perhaps cannot know, is, on analysis, of deeper import than what we do know. You doubt it? Well, think again. Gravity is a thing we know, up to a point, but what lies behind it? We have advanced in our acquaintance with nerves and

neurones, but how does a nerve feel? and what is that self which uses the nerve system as the agent of its manifestation? We know the atom as never before, yet this knowledge, and a thousand other knowledges, are not as meaningful as the unknown. To know all the secrets of the Universe would be an intellectual disaster.

## VIII

The words *science* and *religion* are set over against each other as if they were mortal enemies. They are not. The real conflict is between two spheres of organized knowledge: *natural science* and *theology*. Between natural science and religion—which is the expression of our attitude to life and the Eternal—there can be no quarrel. Here is the flower of the wall-cress. The plant is thus described by the botanist:

STEUOPHRAGMA. *Celak*.

Annual or perennial herbs . . . pubescent, with branching hairs. Leaves alternate, sometimes mainly basal: blades entire, toothed or pinnatifid. Flowers perfect, in racemes. Sepals four, corolla white: petals four surpassing the sepals. Stamens six. Ovary sessile: style short: stigma two lobed. Ovules numerous. Pods slender, slightly angled, the valves nerveless. . . . Colyledons incumbent.

This is how the man of science looks at the wall-cress and its flowers. How does the poet look at it, or at any flower which peeps out of a little cranny in the garden wall? He may know little of the science of the thing, but he says:

Flower in the crannied wall  
I pluck you out of the crannies  
I hold you there, root and all, in my hand  
Little flower—but *if* I could understand  
What you are, root and all, and all in all,  
I should know what God and man is.

This is the religion of the flower, and very delightful it is, too. But no botanist ever wrote to Lord Tennyson alleging that his apostrophe to the wall-cress flower, or whatever it might have been, was contrary to the teaching of science. And no Doctor of Divinity ever wrote to

the botanist objecting to the manner in which plants and flowers have been classified, declaring that such classifications hindered religious feeling.

Natural science tells us about the human flower, and the world we live in: a marvellous inventory of Nature's facts and forces. Religion is our response to the wonder and greatness of existence. Thus there is no conflict. There is not even a discord. Men of science have no dispute with religion any more than they have with poetry. What they object to is the preference for old guesses instead of scientific knowledge.

## IX

Finally, for yourself, and when answering the questions of other men, seek *definitions*. That is how Socrates brought philosophy down from heaven. It will also be the method by which you clear the road to truth. A definition is itself capable of definition, and the lexicographer calls it an ordered group of words "determining the elements, attributes, or relations of one object so as to distinguish it, whether as an individual or one of a class, from other objects." Use this as a test for every definition you make. . . . As for synonyms, Professor Walter Raleigh, in his entertaining essay on *Style*, affirms there are no synonyms. Very true. Crabbe's book of *Synonyms* is a scholarly analysis which proves that synonyms do not exist. They *appear* to exist, but appearance is not reality. In court the lawyer asks, "Did the prisoner actually strike you?" The witness answers, "That is the truth. He did." The lawyer follows up with, "He did not merely push you away? He gave you a blow?" And the witness answers, "That is a fact." *Fact* and *truth* are here used synonymously, but they are not synonymous.

Before closing I must answer an objection. Joubert says, "Banish from words all uncertainty of meaning and you have made an end of poetry and eloquence." What words? If all words are referred to, I have to say

that thousands of them have the needed clarity already, and that there is no uncertainty to be banished. If the reference is to specific words, or classes of words, I can only imagine that as symbols of thought their uncertainty is congenital, and that to abolish it is impossible. Perhaps it is undesirable. Is this the idea which Joubert had in mind? Carlyle avers that "in a symbol there is concealment, yet revelation." Words often suggest more than they connote according to the dictionary; and when used in certain associations they convey a meaning beyond that which is usual to them. This is for them the higher clarity—a use which both conceals and reveals.

## XI

I desire you to select for yourself the terms in this letter which need your attention. When the list is complete look them up in your big dictionary, also in your dictionary of synonyms. *Cause* is one of these words, and to master it in its various uses will provide you with a weapon of offence and defence the value of which can hardly be over-estimated.

Cordially yours,

## Questions and Problems

1. Is it possible to *know* a thing without *realizing* it? If not, what is the difference between knowledge and realization? Schopenhauer knew the miseries and sufferings of the world, but did he realize them? If he did, would he have been content to remain inactive? Anatole France says, "Is it possible for the mind to conceive all the pain and suffering that lie pent within a great city? It is my belief that if a man succeeded in realizing it, the weight of it would crush him to earth."
2. "I am getting . . . sick of art. I don't exactly know what it means. I couldn't define it: but it's

an actuality with me none the less. It is, I suppose, a state of mind." (Joseph Hergesheimer in *The American Mercury*, November 1926.) Analyse this statement. What analogy is there here between this apprehension and use of art and the apprehension and use of moral ideas?

3. Nietzsche asks: "What is good? All that heightens in man the feeling of power, the desire for power, power itself." Would you say this may be *a* good but not *the* good? Compare with Emerson's essay on *Power*.
4. Emerson says: "The appearance of Character makes the State unnecessary." Write a note on the use of the word character in this connection. What is the significance of the capital "C"?
5. How would you interpret the word in italics in the following sentence from Anatole France? "The best thing in life is the vision we have of I know not what *unreality* that is essentially no part of life."
6. Shelley says in his *Defence of Poetry*, arguing the needs of poetry, "We have more moral, political, and historical wisdom than we know how to reduce into practice: we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies." This was in the last century. Are conditions the same to-day? If not, are we embodying in practice all we know? Discuss the evidence.
7. Professor Lloyd Morgan, in his *Psychology for Teachers*, remarks of Kipling's *Sea Lullaby* that it is excellent, but that if anyone asks him why, he answers, "I can say very little . . . and I shall feel that this little is altogether inadequate." In your opinion, is a *formulated* opinion desirable, possible, and necessary? Or is it better for some appreciations to remain unanalysed? If so, why?
8. "The great point in life lies in passing from the purely intellectual comprehension of a thing to its real total and entire comprehension by means of the phenomenon which the theologians call Grace, and to which Bergson has assigned so great an importance." (Tourquet-Milnes, in *Pascal to Proust*.) What does this word Grace mean in this quotation?
9. Extract from the letter of a persistent Pragmatist.

“‘True ideas,’ as Professor James said, ‘are those which we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify. False ideas are those which we cannot.’ I had the idea that I could digest lobster salad for supper, having eaten it late at night for some years without disturbing results. The truth worked well. But truth changes. I ate lobster salad at 9.30 p.m. last Tuesday and became ill. Was the true idea, therefore, made into a false idea? By no means. I found that I had inadvertently introduced another food into the meal which did not harmonize with lobster. It set up a fermentation. . . . I still have the true idea, with the added fact that lobster salad followed by pineapple is, for me, a diabolical mischief. Experience has deepened my pragmatism by an antithetical occurrence.”

Examine the words *validate*, *corroborate*, and *verify*. What are their shades of meaning? Or do they amount to the same thing?

## LETTER VII

### Why We Don't Think Alike

DEAR ROGER,

There was a phrase in your last letter which arrested my attention. It said: "What puzzles me is that men of the same race, age, status, and education are often so violently opposed to each other in their convictions on vital subjects." Very true. There have been men of the same family—like Cardinal Newman and his brother, Professor F. W. Newman—who were the poles asunder in opinion. George Eliot somewhere refers to a family whose intellectual divergences made their facial resemblances a mockery.

I remember the first time this puzzle of yours assailed me. I was a student, and found two professors of logic absolutely opposed to each other on free trade and tariff reform. They were both highly accomplished logicians. Why then did they not think alike? Of course it was the sort of question a young man *would* ask himself. To-day it makes me smile. And yet, after all, it is an intelligent question. It led me to believe that there were factors in the formation of opinion which either deny logic or rise about it. If you were to assemble the world's great logicians for a conference on modern affairs, you would be astonished at the capers of the syllogism. Several active series of causes combine to produce these staccato differences. Birth comes first: and it includes race, place, temperament and social status. Education comes next: and it embodies that of the home, school, and college. Experience is the final factor. . . . Let us see how these work together.

#### II

Temperament is the most original, and it has a very potent influence. I use the word in the sense of personal



constitution, or make-up: that compound of body and mind and soul which inevitably results in a conformity to type, or else eventuates in a pronounced individualism. I can here deal with only one aspect, namely, the proportion between what we call feeling and intellect. I might use the terms intuition and logic as indicative of these two tendencies. Now some men have great intellectual powers, but the forces grouped under the head of feeling are still more powerful. The heart finally governs the head. This is a theme which will recur in my letters. With one third less feeling the chances are that Cardinal Newman would have been among the unbelievers. With one third more feeling, and one third less sceptical acumen, Matthew Arnold would have been a great divine. Here are two Englishmen of the same era, educated in much the same way, trained at the same University, studying the same problems, yet leagues apart in mental attitude and conviction.

You have observed how tenaciously Anatole France held on to the symbols of Catholicism the while he satirized its dogmas and moralities. You have noticed how Santayana reveres Christian emblems yet preaches the most definite materialism. Those two men—one dead, one living—show response to the memories of early youth: they are obedient to Latin instincts: and they express, each in his own way, the thoughts of a nature where intellect is in the end predominant. The heart has its say, but the syllogism is finally supreme. . . . On the other hand, when the logical powers have no ascendancy over the intuitions, we get men like Pascal: and when the emotional tendencies are in charge, supported by mental powers that are preternaturally positive, we get men like Rousseau.

### III

Have you not seen these results among men of more modest attainments? If you go to church, and hear a man shout his prayers, and bang the seat with his fist, you may be certain that he is trying to get more faith. In my young days I knew a man like that, and I was astonished when he went over to the secularists. To-day his action is clear. He was naturally a sceptic, but had

needs of heart which called for satisfaction. . . . And when I hear modern rationalists, eager to destroy church life, and almost ready to use their guns against Christians, I think of Saul of Tarsus. There is something pathological about the assertive atheism of to-day, and its proponents never see themselves as inverted apostles. They could profitably apply Freud's principle of projection to the elucidation of their own characters.

Lenin's mentality has been highly praised, but this opinion confuses mental *force*—will—with pure intellect. His grip of facts outside his own country was feeble; in some instances contemptible. His imagination was, in consequence, a false guide. . . . But let us assume the popular estimate was correct. Like most Russians he had a capacity for religion, and when he had thrown over the Greek Church he had to find some occupation for his idealistic feelings. He found it in the gospel of Karl Marx, which promised a heaven on earth. Nobody is astonished that he caused notices to be put up: "Religion: the opium of the people." He who attacks religion, as the leading Bolshevik did, is always actuated by jealousy. Between Bolshevism and Christianity there are curious analogies. The Soviet idea has its theology. Marx is its god, and *Das Kapital* is its Bible. Its elect are the proletariat, and its heaven is an earthly paradise. It has its Ten Commandments, and sin is rebellion against the decrees of authority.

#### IV

In this way I have sought to explain some of the extraordinary differences in human opinions, and also of the aggressive tendencies which characterize our convictions. When the late John Morley expressed an aversion from Sunday tennis he was giving voice to early beliefs and to a somewhat Puritanical tendency, in strange contrast to the known scepticism of his mind. When Professor Huxley advocated the reading of the Bible in London schools, he was evidencing a deep desire for the moral welfare of the young through the medium of great literature; and his ethical instincts were of the highest order despite his vigorous attacks on Christian doctrines. . . . So when you are amazed that your own

brother should become a Socialist, while you maintain the family tradition for Capitalism, you must seek for the key in the make-up of his mind: at any rate, that is the first place to explore. Of course, there are others. Experience, for instance. You will probably find that he has had some rough deals from unscrupulous employers, and that he has friends who have had similar misfortunes. The reading of Socialist literature followed, and, in due time, he emerged as a convinced disciple. This is not the history of every Socialist, but it is symptomatic of the active majority who by nature are realists first and idealists afterwards. If workers had always had a square deal there would not have been much Socialism. Its best ideas would have been embodied in the progressive evolution of the State under the heading of economy. Your brother at thirty is full of ardour. At sixty, like many others, he will be cooler and infinitely more critical of his creed.

Your study of temperament will include an analysis of *prejudice*—which, of course, means a prejudgment: speaking or writing an already formed opinion. I recall meeting with a highly competent British Army officer from the North-West Frontier. He was no end of a good fellow, but when I mentioned politics he said he knew nothing about them, adding, “but I do know I’m a strong Tory.” There could be no better example of political prejudice. But don’t laugh too soon. You might yourself be caught napping. And I, also. For no man is entirely destitute of these prejudices. They are made up of early experiences, often of an emotional character, and, as improperly accepted opinions, they tend to spring up into consciousness when their presence is least expected. This is one reason why Descartes began to philosophize by subjecting everything to doubt. But only men of his calibre can do that. The average man had better draw up his list of certainties.

Prejudices may be conscious or subconscious: or partly one and partly the other. Charles Lamb’s prejudice against Scotsmen was conscious enough, and yet its origin may have been determined by some element

of which he was little aware. It is admitted that people with prejudices are often interesting, and Elia himself is one. But as a matter of cold fact he was entirely in error about the Northerners, just as Carlyle was mistaken about Lamb himself when he described him as having only "a thin streak of Cockney wit." Was Carlyle prejudiced against him because on one occasion, at a friend's table, Lamb took a spoon and helped himself to a mouthful of Mrs. Carlyle's porridge, "just to see what it was like"? Oh, yes, there are reasons why some great men have said things against other great men.

## VI

The best illustration of wilful prejudice that I know is given in Fullerton's *Introduction to Philosophy*. Here it is:

"Sometimes it is suddenly revealed to a man that he has been accepting two orders of truth. I once walked and talked with a good scholar who discoursed of high themes and defended warmly certain theses. I said to him: 'If you could go into the house opposite, and discover unmistakably whether you are in the right or in the wrong—discover it as unmistakably as you can discover whether there is or is not furniture in the drawing-room—would you go?' He thought over the matter for a while, and then answered frankly: 'No! I should not go: I should stay out here and argue it out.'"

Once more I must warn you against hasty condemnation. For anything I know you may accept the notion that Papal Infallibility applies to all the acts of His Holiness. You may be reasonably sure of it, having entertained the notion for fifteen years. You would be almost willing to bet on it, if you were a betting man. Moreover, you have a feeling that you *want* to be right because, if you are not, down crashes a long cherished notion. Well, it will have to crash, for the Pope is infallible only when he speaks *ex cathedra*—at any rate that is the doctrine. The reality may be quite another matter. . . . Think of the preconceived notions people have on a vast range of subjects, from graft in a political party to the Prince of Wales as a leader of fashion, all of which notions have been accepted for years without

question. The bald truth about the Prince is that among millions of young Englishmen very few care a brass button what he wears, and I should imagine that the Prince himself is grateful for this bit of privacy. Most of us have a stubborn attitude on some cherished subject. When we are asked for evidence, we have a tendency to hedge. It is human to refuse to be photographed when caught in company with a Fallacy.

## VII

This leads me to speak of intellectual honesty. It ought not to require courage to admit that your opponent is right when you *know* he is right. All the same, it is often difficult. But this is a moral rather than an intellectual shortcoming. By intellectual honesty I mean honesty to yourself. If your inquiries, carefully carried out, lead you in a direction you did not expect, accept the fact, provisionally, and go on with the investigation. Don't try to *lead* your mind. *Follow it*. You are seeking the Truth. That alone is your aim, not what you *wish* to be true.

Of course, you may counter me by saying, "Yes, but is it not determined for us already? Is there not a *Will to Deny* just as there is a *Will to Believe*?" There is. I will deal with it in another letter. The point I have in mind now is well expressed by Emerson in his essay on *Experience*. He wrote: "The ardours of piety agree at last with the coldest scepticism—that nothing is of us or our works—that all is of God. . . . I would gladly be moral and keep due metes and bounds, which I dearly love, and allow the most to the will of man, but I have set my heart on honesty in this chapter, and I can see nothing at last, in success or failure, than more or less of vital force supplied from the Eternal." To set your heart on honesty in thought is a great deliverance from bondage. I am not saying that Emerson was right or wrong; although he has a disconcerting habit of being right *in the end*. What I do say is that until a man has attained this virtue of truth in the inward parts he is acting as servitor to some interest which in his heart he knows is holding him down,

## VIII

So now you know, to some extent at least, why Plato could never have been anybody else than Plato, and why Aristotle was inevitably the master of those who know. You can understand why every thinker is classified as a Platonist or an Aristotelean.

Take all the great philosophers and leaders. Analyse them. *You will find their destiny in the structure of their inner life.* That is why patience is needed in the examination of arguments that contravene our own opinions. Other men, with doctrines that completely antagonize those we hold to be true, may be quite as sincere as we are ourselves. Of course, if we find a doctrine which leads to mischievous action, we do not hesitate to condemn it, as Walter Pater did in reviewing Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Grey*. And we are rightly on our guard against supercertainty: that kind of conviction which says, "I am right, and I am going to compel the world to accept my beliefs." The history of thought is marred by the records of individuals and groups who have sought by force to impose their convictions upon a reluctant world.

## IX

I am hoping that this view of life with thousands of conflicting ideas, most of which are necessitarian in a partial sense, will not blind you to the great unities that exist. As individuals—I am now briefly summarizing—we do not think alike because the factors which produce differences are too many and too strong. Even those men who have lived in almost identical circumstances are often as far apart intellectually as the East is from the West. This is due to temperament, the mental make-up of personality. . . . Of course prejudices are removable, and intellectual honesty should be cultivated. Yet every soul finally stands alone to make its decisions for Truth.

This decision is either preponderantly realistic in type, or preponderantly idealistic; for, in the final issue, there are only two schools of thinkers. In details the representatives of these schools are utterly diversified,

and it would be a somewhat dull world if they were not. The aim to make every man think the same as his fellows has never been successful; not even in religions with the same deities. Material and the spiritual are adjectives which have classified philosophies from the earliest times. We shall continue to use them. And, since the spiritual is superior to the material, it is important that every man should be on the side of the angels.

The chief words of this letter are: individualism, *mental force*, proletariat, *ex cathedra*, fallacy. Your philosophical vocabulary is growing rapidly.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

1. How do you distinguish between a subconscious tendency and a conscious preference? If a strong tendency to musical expression is subconscious, is it not also a conscious preference? Or is the conscious preference something immediate: e.g. the liking for some new kind of scenery, while the subconscious tendency is native to the constitution, or dates back to early years?
2. Take yourself and a friend as subjects. Both of you have opinions that are similar in some points, different in others. This applies to character also. How far, according to your estimate, is this combination of opinion and character traceable to conscious preferences, and how far to subconscious tendencies?
3. Criticize the following statement:  
"Beliefs of all kinds are the determinist outcome of our mental nature; therefore every attempt to change these beliefs is futile."  
Introduce considerations from (a) militant religious history, and (b) the aggressive history of free thought.

It was once affirmed that a man who had been trained as a Liberal, and had represented his party in the House, was *prejudiced* in favour of his political creed. How far is the statement right, and where is it wrong?

"A man who is too ready to listen to arguments against his own opinions, as if eager to be converted, is likely to become a vacillator, changing with the wind." Say why you agree or disagree with this statement.

Write a possible and probable explanation of the following facts:

"The Rev. Joseph Barker renounced his creed and became an assistant of Charles Bradlaugh, the Atheist. Some years later he renounced Atheism and returned to the Church."

Estimate the effects of sudden and violent changes in opinion or conviction. Thus, Haeckel, after a religiously devout and orthodox period in youth, turns to monism—and bitterness. In contrast, Darwin, minus this dramatic "'bout face," proceeds steadily and patiently to the end, changing his views, doubtless, but without bitterness.

Joubert remarks that "some minds have a nucleus of error which attracts and assimilates everything to itself." How would you interpret this remark?

"A tolerant intellectual is a contradiction in terms, for the intellectuals are, by definition, professional traffickers in ideas and theories, and they have a thousand reasons for being intolerant when the average man has one." (Ernest Boyd, in *Harper's*, July 1927.) Examine this statement.



## LETTER VIII

### The Eternal

DEAR ROGER,

Your friend's question, "How shall I think about God?" is something of a poser because he restricts me to thought on purely naturalistic lines: that is, he wishes me to proceed as if religion did not exist. I question whether this can be done: for the idea of God is one which by its very nature does not belong to the intellect alone. It has to do with the heart working under mental supervision. However, I will make a beginning.

I would say to him, "Ask yourself two questions: *What changes?* and *What abides?*" Look without and look within. Above and beneath. Look everywhere. Is there anything that does not change? If the natural world is constantly renewing itself in detail, is it permanent as a whole? Is matter eternal? Or do we ascribe infinite and unchangeable qualities only to the Unseen? . . . You see I have gone back to Parmenides and Heraclitus, 500 B.C. or thereabouts, whose great occupation was to distinguish what was enduring from that which was fleeting. They professed to disagree, but Parmenides, referring to the uncreated, said that "it never was, nor will be, but only is." Heraclitus, although an apostle of change, declared that "the philosopher's business is to discover the Eternal."

We will therefore make it our business, too: for if we can find the idea of changelessness amid the things that appear and disappear, we shall have made a real beginning. . . . I think you will easily succeed in that enterprise. Does not the man of science, who is often without any religious leanings, like Spencer himself,

concede the presence of an Eternal Energy—the source of all appearances—that which remains when other things have come and gone?

## II

From this it is easy to approach the next step: that the Eternal is also Invisible. Of one thing we seem to be certain without resorting to argument: that this visible spectacle of a created world is but the expression of a force which lies behind the phenomena. We go back to the Ether of space, and back of that is—what? Nothing visible, nothing tangible—something we call the Unseen.

Place the words in opposition thus:

Visible	.	.	.	Invisible
Temporal	.	.	.	Eternal

As antitheses they present no problem. They arouse no dissent. The words themselves are used by scientists and philosophers without confusion. As words they stand for two worlds, although there is a vast difference of opinion as to what these worlds are in constitution and destiny. Nevertheless, they are numbered among our supreme certainties, despite here and there the objurgations of an absolute idealist or an invincible sceptic. If we say, "No man hath seen God at any time," we can also say, "No man has seen *man* at any time." I mean that literally.

The essential self, the ego, the human personality, is as invisible as the Deity. The sceptical surgeon who is reported to have said, after years of cutting up bodies and brains, he had never seen a *soul* was an honest man. And no liar. He spoke the truth, for soul is of the unseen.

## III

If instead of soul he had referred to *mind*, the result would have been the same. The power of memory, to select one instance, cannot be detected by the eye. You could chloroform a man, open his skull, and inspect his brain without finding a single "faculty." He might be a poet of distinction, but you could never see his

imagination. He might be a financial genius, but nowhere could you get a glimpse of the gift for dollars. Even those brain areas with known localized functions, like speech and vision, are areas and nothing more. We never see anything but the map of a brain with its curious and seemingly haphazard convolutions.

Inability to see the ego does not debar us from seeing the egotist, the man whose unpleasant self-assertion displeases us; nor does it deter us from knowing the face of our best friend. And the significance of the fact is this: that we never doubt the existence of either the egotist or the friend. We know they exist because the evidences of mind and quality of soul, as expressed physically in their actions, are beyond dispute. At any rate they are beyond dispute to anybody but a solipsist—a man who doubts the existence of any mind but his own. Clifford could say that “the existence of my conception of you in my consciousness, carries with it a belief in the existence of you outside of my consciousness.” We therefore arrive at our final statement: that *man is a visible creature who in essence is invisible*.

There is nothing startlingly new in *that*. It is the veriest of commonplaces. Yet, like many others, our familiarity with it has robbed it of its real significance. For if we cannot see man, is it astonishing that we cannot see God? And if we have no difficulty in accepting the reality of the soul as evidence to us through man's senses, why should we not as naturally accept the reality of an Eternal Being? The method of understanding is the same in both cases: behind the phenomena of human behaviour is man's unseen mind: behind the phenomena of the changing universe is the Unseen Energy.

#### IV

When I was at college I gathered together a great variety of conceptions of God. I will take six of them. Herbert Spencer called God the Unknowable. Emerson spoke of the Oversoul. Dr. James Martineau believed in the Heavenly Father. So did Henry Ward Beecher: but Charles Haddon Spurgeon was not slow to emphasize attributes other than love: and to Cardinal Newman, Deity exercised vengeance against sin, and punished

heresy with decision. I came to the conclusion then that a man's view of God was in some measure an edition of his own exalted self. After I had heard Spurgeon's declamations against heresy—and reflected on them: and after I had pondered Newman's cold banishment of both heresy and heretics, I realized that these very different men were seeking the same end: fidelity.

And their conception of Deity was not dissimilar. What God intended to do with sin and sinners was what they would do were they in God's place. To listen to Beecher was to get the impression of God as a Father, who watched over His children tenderly and with indulgence. Punishment? It was the last thought, not the first. James Martineau, a man with true spiritual presence, put reverence first; God was Almighty Love. To Emerson, the Deity was the Universal Spirit—ethereal and impersonal. By the time we reach Herbert Spencer the personal element has disappeared and the Unknowable is enthroned. To-day, God is the Creator as mathematician. We have returned to Pythagoras and the divinity of numbers.

But the point is here; however diversified in detail these conceptions are, each postulates the infinite and the eternal amid the changing and the changeless. On the other side of time is eternity. Beyond the limited is the illimitable. . . . To obtain the broad basis for himself should not be difficult for the average man. He has not to unlearn a good deal that has been imparted in the science class-room, consciously or unconsciously. Education, with its over-emphasis on knowledge and the logical powers, has not developed a lop-sidedness of intellect. He has still the precious gift of spontaneity. Soul has not been obscured by sense. He is ready to follow an instinct for affirmation, and not so ready to deny. For these reasons he can not only receive the idea of the Eternal, but can proceed to adopt a name indicative of *character*.

This is a crucial point in theism. Many men are afraid of anthropomorphism—thinking of God in the fashion of a man. They are even more afraid of anthropathism—thinking of God as having human feelings.

But how can we avoid it? To describe super-intelligence by analogies with the highest intelligence we know is surely not an irrational procedure. . . . Yet there has always been a hesitation. Emerson could say "God exists," but it was not Jehovah, nor the Heavenly Father. It was rather that "a breath of wind blows eternally through the universe of souls in the direction of the Right and Necessary." And Matthew Arnold believed that "there is a Power not ourselves which makes for righteousness." Yet both the American mystic and the English critic were trying to express their conception of God. I could give other instances of this caution against the use of human qualities in describing the Eternal, but these will suffice.

## VI

What does God mean to your friend? and to you? That is a question for an individual answer. Remember this: every fact of Nature and consciousness has its measure of mental and spiritual response. If you look at Betelgeuse, that star in Orion which is the largest known to astronomy, and absorb the meaning of all its gigantic figures, you find that it calls up deeper feeling than the pavement on which you stand. The pavement is simply the pavement. Betelgeuse is a star of the greatest magnitude.

To think of the nature of the Eternal is to think the one thought with the greatest affective power, simply because it is the thought that embodies every other thought. It is the beginning and the end. It is the one which summarizes the many. It is the all in all. Consequently, the response you offer will be in accordance with your power to entertain the idea, and with your disposition to use human analogies to represent divine truth. . . . From response to relationship is not a long journey, and the sense of relationship deepens the sense of reality.

## VII

A person must have a name. There is nothing derogatory in that. And yet, naming God has always

been an apprehensive matter—a step forward or a step backward. When a man of modern education is asked to give a name to the Eternal Energy—which means investing it with personality and character—he hesitates. He has memories of reading about Marduk, Baal, Ash-taroth, and a hundred others. Names! He draws back. To bestow a name appears like imposing a limitation, not only on the divine nature, but on his own. I have met Christians who were very indignant with this sense of discrimination. But it is not the finicking thing they take it to be. It is akin to what Mallarmé said: that to name an object is to suppress three-fourths of its charm: the happiness lies in divining it.

Let it be agreed that his reference is to literature, not religion. No matter. The *fact* is before the *name*, always.

### VIII

Experience is greater than its literary embodiment. Beauty is higher than its descriptive terminology. But the Eternal is beyond expression: hence, it is slow to become incarnate in speech and to accept the use of indicative names. That, in fact, is why there are so many of them. The Arabian scholar who knows the ninety-nine names for Allah in the Koran thinks of them as spiritual wealth, and he may be right. Perhaps there are one hundred such names in the Bible—I have never counted them—but my point is that God-consciousness should come first and the name afterwards.

There are thousands to-day who consider the name first and fail to reconcile it with facts: whereas if they first realized the Eternal and then sought to set up a relationship by the use of a name, such as Father, the process would be more natural in itself and more certain in its results.

### IX

Your friend should remember that thought does not begin with thought. It begins with feeling, as Lowell once told us; and poets often lead the way in mental

science. We look at the life of the Universe and allow its varied influences to surge within us. Out of these the God-consciousness emerges. Religion is then a form of behaviourism. It is a natural outcome of the interaction of the external with the internal. Only when artificialities are introduced is the result affected. For instance, a man puts a half-Nelson on his powers of feeling and gives his intellect a tonic by way of encouragement. What happens? He says the idea of God is a contradiction. No wonder. He sought the truth with a stranglehold on his faculties.

When he tackles a problem in mathematics he does not tie up his powers of analysis and synthesis: he gives them all the rope they need. He allows freedom to the whole mind.

I sometimes wish there were no classifications of mental powers, and that thinking, feeling, and willing could be banished altogether. But I fear it is a vain wish. The mind is a unity and nobody knows the exact dividing line between a thought and a feeling: in fact, there is not one. Nevertheless there are *preponderances*. In anger the mind is nearly all feeling: and in deep reflection it is nearly all intellect. But if a man will be only natural when he contemplates the world he lives in, and allow his preponderances their rhythmic expression, he will eventually come to the conclusion that there is an Eternal and a possibility of conscious relationship.

"Dare I say it?" asks Joubert in one of his most striking thoughts. "Dare I say it? God may be easily known if only it is not necessary to define Him."

The word list in this letter is as follows: change, unchangeable, naturalistic, uncreated, tangible, destiny, oburgations, convolutions, faculty, egotist, anthropomorphism, anthropopathism, necessary, divining, terminology, preponderance.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

1. How can the temporal and the eternal be linked together? the changing and the unchangeable? How far does Pascal solve the difficulty when he says, "Man is to himself the mightiest prodigy of Nature: for he is unable to conceive what is body, still less what is mind, but least of all is he able to conceive how a body can be united to a mind: yet this is his proper being."
2. A Stoic on being asked, "What is God?" is said to have answered, "What is God not?" Discuss this answer.
3. Hume wrote that "the fact of pain in the world would prove that God is either not benevolent or not almighty." Would you say in answer that a painless world is not a perfect world? that pain itself is not necessarily an evil? and that pleasure cannot be rightly appreciated apart from its opposite? If not, what line would you take?
4. Maeterlinck writes: "Each man has to seek out his own special aptitude for a higher life in the midst of the humble and inevitable reality of daily existence. Than this there can be no nobler aim in life." Are there individual aptitudes for the higher life? Does one man approach the ideal through art, and another through science, another through religion, and still another through philosophy? What is your own special aptitude?
5. "Faith in the supernatural is a desperate wager made by man at the lowest ebb of his fortunes: it is as far as possible from being the source of that normal vitality which subsequently, if his fortunes mend, he may gradually recover." (Santayana, *Reason in Religion*.) Criticize this statement.
6. "Truth is always changing its form, and with the change new and unsuspected aspects appear. History is necessary to complete this continuous revelation. Time is required for its unfoldment. The Truth to-day in fundamentals will be the Truth a thousand years hence, but a larger and more impressive Truth.



Thus one can safely say that there are two truths: that which is present and that which is future." In what sense, exactly, does the Truth change? It has changed by scientific discovery, but does not Nature still exist? Have our changed views of God changed God Himself? Discuss this matter of change in itself.

7. "When a man has realized the existence of the Eternal he must decide the attitude to be taken up towards this fact of inner experience. He may be indifferent, hostile, or friendly." Analyse these attitudes. Exemplify them from history.
8. If a man were to say to you, "I can't bear the idea of a God. It is senseless and useless," would you be justified in concluding that in his case the existence of a Supreme Being was offensive to his own egoism? If not, why not?

## LETTER IX

### The Philosophy of Mystery

DEAR ROGER,

How much do we know? There are two answers. We—that is the world of men and women—we know so much that no one mind could contain more than a fraction of it. Enter the Library of Congress, Washington, or the British Museum Library in London, or the National Library in Paris, and look at the array of volumes on all subjects; miles of books, dealing with matters within and without, the heavens above, the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth. The sheer mass of knowledge is staggering in its immensity. I hold that knowledge is not everything, but I join the thousands of others who cheerfully and respectfully admit its greatness.

The second answer is very different. What do we know? We know so little that it is hardly anything; for every new advance reveals an increasing area of the unknown. Perhaps that is one reason why increasing knowledge means increasing sorrow. Mysteries, like God, are omnipresent. They surprise us at every turn. The joy of one discovery is sobered by the presence of a new problem. Progress, true to its name, is unending. We never arrive. Knowledge is always in a state of becoming. For this reason the human race is never likely to become dizzy with the pride of intellectual achievements. The presence of the unaccomplished is a deterrent. It promotes the spirit of humility. Du Bois Raymond's *Seven Riddles of the Universe* was a challenge to the dogmatists of his day. It is a challenge still. The riddles have been attacked, and in some respects one or two of them may not look so impressive as they did, but they are unsolved as yet. . . . Einstein and relativity form the greatest of all riddles, to the laity at

any rate. If these are the big riddles, what of the thousands of little riddles? Let us get down to brass tacks; is what we know a bigger thing than what we don't know? Be candid—*it is not*. What we know is approximately a measurable quantity. What we don't know is beyond computation. We can't measure the immeasurable.

## II

I draw a distinction between mysteries and Mystery: mysteries may be cleared up one by one, in whole or in part, but Mystery, because it is "something unknown and incomprehensible in its nature" is a different matter altogether. Have I made the distinction clear? Isolated perplexities of Nature or civilization—like the origin of life or the persistent obscurity of a crime—are mysteries; but Mystery is our apprehension of the unknown as an all pervading element of the Universe itself; our perception of the something that lies behind phenomena.

A man's reaction to this mystery is in some respects an indication of intellectual attitude, if not of character. There are three possible forms of response; indifference, hostility, and reverence. I cannot pause to diagnose each one, but will content myself by saying that when a materialist like Büchner practically affirmed that the mystery of the Universe had been solved, it is evident that he was hostile to that mystery; he, like others of his school, had an objection to the word. Apparently he took up the position that there ought to be no mysteries at all. How different is the attitude of some of the representatives of modern science. For instance, Mr. J. W. N. Sullivan, in *Gallio, or the Tyranny of Science*, says that "the man who prides himself on the complete absence of mystery in his views of the world is not only not representing the scientific method, but will speedily become quite unable to understand it."

I believe that Mystery, in the sense I have defined it, is a necessity. Nay, I will go further and affirm that even some of our minor mysteries are a necessity. I took up a magazine the other day and found an article on "Why is the Unconscious unconscious?" An acute question. The Unconscious *per se* is not an abnormality. It is perfectly normal. There is doubtless a profound

reason why it remains what it is, and, when healthy, should continue without meddlesome interference. Can we not therefore call this an inevitable mystery of the human mind? for any serious and extended effort to abolish it would lead to the loss of rational understanding. An investigator who said, "I will give the lie to the old psychologists and will look at my mind as it really is; I will make myself the observer and the thing observed at one and the same moment," is asking for trouble. He is a sworn foe of an inevitable mystery, and when his experiment is at an end there will be little left of the observer. He himself will then be "under observation."

The mystery of human personality has its analogue in the Intelligence that brought the Universe into being; an Intelligence which to many of us is a fact, but also an ineffable mystery. We apprehend it without comprehension: we reverence it without fear: we bow to it without the feeling of slavish subjection. Whatever attributes we ascribe to God are infinite in degree simply because they cannot be finite: and, if we use the terms of psychology to indicate divine qualities, it is due to the fact that we have no other terms for the purpose. It is claimed that we limit Him if we speak of His Fatherhood. Yes, we do limit Him. It is our misfortune, not our fault. If we could use language which did not so closely identify Super-Intelligence with our own minds, we would be glad to do so. Meanwhile, personality and infinity are accommodatory terms. We do not apologize for them, for they are the best we have. They express the mystery of which our minds have become conscious and which our imagination fails to represent.

### III

Now when Thought retires from a task to which it is unequal, Feeling comes forward to take its place. You can see this happen in natural science, for the deeper problems which for centuries have repelled efforts at solution form around themselves a sort of halo: they are unique and distinctive, and they arouse a feeling in accordance with the mystery that envelops them. . . . This feeling is higher and deeper when one meditates on

the mystery of existence, on the inscrutable nature of both human and divine personality, and on the immensity of the visible Universe. Professor Tyndall, in his *Scientific Use of the Imagination*, says that the scientific investigator finds himself overshadowed by the same awe as that which filled the soul of Kant: "it associates him with a power which gives fullness and tone to his existence but which we can neither analyse nor comprehend."

It is first of all a realization that we are in the presence of a Great Will. Schopenhauer felt it, but felt little else unfortunately. Next, it is a feeling of dependence: to this Will we owe our existence and all that it means. We did not create ourselves. We did not create the world. We are in the hands of the Power that brought the Universe into being. In this feeling of dependence Schleiermacher saw the origin of religion. Sometimes the feeling was obscured by fears and fancies: sometimes it raised antagonisms and revolts. But it is a feeling possessed by mankind. In some educated minds it is suppressed because it constitutes an assault on egoism. In others its expression is excessive: they believe they have discovered its secret and wish to impose their discovery on others. But no normal individual is minus the feeling, either in an intellectualized realization, or in one that is emotional. If Matthew Arnold had defined religion as "the knowledge of dependence touched with emotion" instead of "morality touched with emotion," he would have been nearer the truth; for, primarily, religion is just that one thing—an emotional apprehension of the Will of God, and of our dependence upon it for everything we know, and have, and are.

The history of religion is the story of the attempt to adjust the mind and heart of man to this one ineffable Mystery. As a story it is replete with crudities and illiteracies, cruelties and jealousies, but above these, towering in their importance, are the persistence of a great Ideal, the nobility of sacrifice, and the unselfishness of service.

#### IV

I have to smile at the complacency with which some writers speak of religion as either dying or dead. It is passing through changes, doubtless, but its course is

synchronous with that of mankind. How long will the race endure? Put it down in the figured estimate of science, and you can say that religion has the same longevity. The world has still millenniums for the further development of Spirit; and the religious consciousness has not yet even approached its fullness of life. The prophets disagree? Every age has its Jeremiahs and Johns: the latter to point out the Ideal, the former to criticize our shortcomings. Both prophets are a gift of God. The Johns give us vision and the Jeremiahs give us the lash. To some people this struggle for spiritual pre-eminence is not welcome. It looks too much like retrogression. As a matter of fact it is the pain of growth. Man aims at a condition where effort will be at a minimum. Nature and Spirit seem resolved that man's effort shall be at a maximum. Only in this way can he ultimately attain his ideal. Struggle is not an evil but a good. Viewed in this light, the history of religion in the past, and a survey of its present condition, do not suggest futility: they indicate an upward effort. The story of dogmas is not always pleasant reading. Far from it. But it is a progressive development. Every epoch has its prevailing ideas, and the forms of all knowledge are influenced accordingly. But the soul of truth remains.

I am often astonished at the pessimistic views expressed by clergymen and laymen about the future of the faith. They seem to think that most of the goodness of human life lies in the past: that there never were such evils as we see around us to-day: and that, unless a miracle happens, the faithful will be outnumbered, outgeneralled, and laid low. Do you take that view? I cannot think that you do, for in one of your letters you refer to "the way in which Bacon's view of antiquity changed some of your ideas." Bacon said, as you pointed out, that the days of Egypt, Greece, and Rome were the youth of the world, and that the present time is the real antiquity. True. Therefore it is reasonable to believe, despite appearances, that we shall see an increasing maturity, a growing morality, purer politics, better government, and more international amity. If not, then

the world's best days are over and we have nothing but moral and spiritual decline ahead of us. Evil with a capital E is to be the Ruler in Charge.

You say you do not believe in the hard Calvinism in which you were raised. Perhaps not. But the esoteric side of Calvinism is true. It means that the eternal decrees of God will be carried out. Nothing can stop them. It means that the temporal wrong will yield to the eternal right. It declares that God having created the world will Himself control its destiny. . . . A remark made by a theologian of philosophic cast often returns to me when I read lugubrious accounts of present-day conditions. To a complainant who had been unusually dismal he said, "What kind of a God do you believe in: weak or omnipotent?" Or one might vary the question by saying, "What sort of faith is yours? An opinion touched with hope, or a red-blooded confidence which not only saves you from despair but moves life to vaster issues?"

## VI

On re-reading what I have written, I feel the need of guarding against any misconception of the value of knowledge. Knowledge is power. The more we know about important subjects the better it is for us. But knowledge is not everything. We do not require a citizen to study coinage and currency before he is allowed to earn and spend his dollars. A child can experience great happiness without ever thinking what happiness is in itself. . . . And no genius, or talent, or advanced education is necessary for the apprehension of spiritual truth. Mystery and worship are in natural sequence. When Thought is defeated Feeling takes up the task of adjustment. Religion is the feeling of dependence on the Higher Will; a belief in its omnipresence and omnipotence. The man who can say with all his mind and all his heart, "I believe in God," has a practical solution of life's problems.

Cordially yours,

Mystery, incomprehensible, apprehension, accommodatory, will, realization, and esoteric are the chief words.

### Questions and Problems

1. Assuming that there are three attitudes towards the Mystery of Existence, how many people in a hundred would you put down as indifferent? and hostile? and reverent?
2. Write a brief note on the necessity of Mystery based upon (a) the impossibility of our comprehending the greatness of the Universe due to limited faculties: and (b) the consequent call for adjustment in some form of mental respect, and that refinement of courtesy called worship.
3. Thomas Hardy wrote:

Has some vast Imbecility  
Mighty to build and blend  
But impotent to tend,  
Framed us in jest and left us to hazardry?  
Thus things around. No, answer I. . . .

Here is the hostile attitude. Analyse it, especially the idea of an Imbecility that can build and blend but cannot tend.

4. Can a man perform more good works than are strictly necessary for the maintenance of his character and the discharge of his duty? If so, what becomes of the superfluous merit? If not, what is the difference between the goodness of a man whose merits are in excess and a man whose merits are not up to the standard of duty done?
5. Do we have to pay for spiritual power? or is it free? If not free, is the price solely that of effort? Could a youth of twenty-one possess the spiritual power of a man of fifty? or is this power an acquisition of age and experience? Give reasons.
6. Analyse the following statement:  
"Mysticism may bring certainty for the individual but not for the multitude. A prolific source of error in the past, no good can be expected of it to-day."



7. Professor Tyndall, in his *Scientific Use of the Imagination*, says, "When the structures are pronounced to be without difference because the microscope can discover none, then I think the microscope begins to play a mischievous part." Write a brief note showing an analogy between the microscope and the mind of man in search of the meaning of life.
8. "When I think of God I can't help thinking of Him as occupying one place more than another. I believe He is everywhere, and yet not to the same degree. There must be an answer to this question." (From a student.) Yes, there is an answer. What is yours?

## **SECOND SERIES**



## LETTER 1

### Nature and Spirit

#### I

DEAR ROGER,

Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, according to your last letter, has, in spite of its being a forgotten book, made an unusual impression on you. I remember its first appearance, and all the discussions to which it gave rise. At that time nobody thought that Drummond had strengthened the case for materialism. They did think—some of them—that he was supporting Calvinism; and a few complained that he had left no room for the Devil. Some readers are hard to please.

There are laws of Nature, and there are laws of Spirit, you say, but that on the surface the laws of Nature seem to embrace everything. You instance the case of a friend who died in the war. You point out that his coming into the world was the result of natural processes; that his mind developed with his body; that he became a man of distinction; and that a bullet ended his career on the battlefield. Without the body there is no mind; with the death of the body there is the end of mind. Therefore the spiritual is an offspring of the physical, and is absolutely dependent on it. Isn't that your difficulty? Very well. In some of my letters I have indicated a few of the differences between physical and moral law. Here I shall try to confine my attention to the two worlds of Nature and Spirit.

Nature, as a word, we know. We know it also as a fact of experience. Its meaning is clear. Spirit is not so easy to follow either as a word or a fact. It means the *mind* for one thing, but it also means the *soul*. Mind is power as seen in knowing, feeling, and willing. Soul is Self behind this power. So when we talk of Spirit we refer to the total activity of the invisible elements in us—not only of thought in all its aspects

but of actions as expressive of thought. . . . *Contrast* is the first item to claim attention. There is a world of difference between a beautiful flower and a beautiful thought, despite the claims of both to the use of the same objective. The flower has form, colour, and fragrance. The thought is destitute of these qualities except in a symbolic sense; for its invisibility associates it with the world of spiritual things. So striking is this contrast that the originating agency—mind, soul, spirit—has nearly always been regarded as non-physical in its nature; and Wallace, in his *Darwinism*, was unable to find a material source for a product with such divergent qualities.

## II

Huxley's *Romanes Lecture* shows that the morals of Nature are in conflict with the morals of man. Man has a moral sense which rises superior to what the Professor called cosmic ethics; it condemns some of Nature's methods as unethical. Assuming that Nature is open to such criticism, a grave problem arises; for if intellect and morals alike are refinements of the matter of which the planet is made, how does it come to pass that this matter can evolve a being gifted with a consciousness it does not itself possess, and which can criticize adversely its own origin? From the primordial slime of æons past, through endless mutations of form, there comes at last, so it is alleged, a body, a brain, and a soul, in a unified personality, capable of looking back on the story of his development and of claiming a moral perception superior to anything in his origin. This enigma was apparently insoluble to Huxley. And not to him alone. Nobody knows the *how* of matter's association with spirit, or the method by which the physical takes on moral quality.

Heine once made a remark which will serve to introduce another aspect of the subject. He said that if he had to choose between an aching tooth and an aching conscience he would choose the aching tooth. What is the difference between these two aches—beyond the fact that one is called physical and one is called mental? The aching tooth, due to an exposed nerve, is physical

in its beginning but mental in its realization. The aching conscience is vastly different.

A man who is guilty of perjury in court has broken no physical law. He may suffer the pangs of remorse because by bearing false witness he has caused an innocent man to lose a sum of money; but the origin and nature of the offence lie outside the world of Nature. It begins in mind and soul, and only in an indirect manner does it touch the body. The physiology and psychology of an aching tooth are not without problems—the existence of purely physical pain has been denied by authorities more than once—but they are daylight itself when contrasted with all that is involved in an aching conscience. What is the difference between that chemistry of brain action which ends in self-accusation and that which eventuates in self-approbation?

### III

To answer that question is practically impossible, and I wish to state the accepted reason why. In the first place the mind is non-material. There is no controversy about that statement, although there is about its relationship to the material of the brain. When a man wags his head he moves his mind about at the same time. Or does he not? If he scales Mount Everest he takes his mind with him, just as he does if he descends into a coal pit. His mind, though non-material, is where his body is; the one point of difference being that his body occupies space and his mind appears to be independent of it. Then how does this non-material mind act in a material brain? We do not know yet, but there are two theories; *interactionism* and *parallelism*. The first tends to unify brain and mind. The second keeps them associated but apart. A volume would be needed to discover the pros and cons of the two.

### IV

You will be wise to acquaint yourself with the wider relationships between mind and body, otherwise the material and the spiritual will be less interpretable than they ought to be. Some of the old books are still worth

reading—Carpenter's *Mental Physiology*, for instance. Dr. Moore's *Power of the Body on the Soul* (also its complementary volume, both very scarce now) is interesting but probably not reliable. He speaks of a kind of wind which blows periodically in Buenos Ayres, and which promotes a murderous spirit in those who are that way inclined. He may be right and he may be wrong. But there is nothing impossible in the statement. . . . However, modern books are more scientific, and their number is becoming legion. It is instructive to read them in pairs; say Bain's *Mind and Body* with McDougall's volume on the same subject or Bergson's *Creative Evolution*.

Psycho-therapeutics has brought Nature and Spirit into new prominence because of the evidence that the mind can cause and cure functional disorders. Healing, so closely connected with religion from time immemorial, has always been a primary and necessary element in medicine, but mainly in its physical aspects. It was held that Nature, in the form of bodily agencies, sealed up the wound and restored full activities. To-day the mental factor figures more conspicuously than in the past. It is realized that if a man of high suggestibility *thinks* disease he may get disease; and that if he thinks freedom from it he may keep it at a distance. It is also realized that mind may set up a neurosis; and that there may be a mischief in the unconscious which has evil effects on the body. Psycho-analysis has not reached its final form—many changes await it—but it has established itself as a fact, although not without its challengers.

Nature and Spirit find their great contrast in death. It has been said that Nature created all men equal, the chemicals of each human body being worth about ninety cents a carcase. She is no respecter of persons. The body and brain of a genius and the body and brain of an idiot are signed for when they reach Nature's death-house, and both are thrown on the common heap,

“to lie in cold obstruction and to rot.”

Death in the natural world is an end; the time for dissolution and redistribution of the physical elements.

Nobody seems to be satisfied with death. Everybody tries to defeat it. Even the Bolsheviks work hard to secure physical immortality for Lenin, and a special embalming preserves his features for the gaze of the faithful. . . . The whole thought and effort of the race is to secure perpetuity. Extinction of good in any of its forms is looked upon as something to be resisted and if possible overcome. The essence of Spirit is eternal, and that is one reason why we can observe the struggle to give permanent duration to the things we value. Real values belong to the changeless not the changing.

## VI

But the one fundamental difference between the world of Nature and the world of Spirit is that the one is *quantitative* and the other *qualitative*. You can analyse brains and state their weights, their comparative sizes, their convolutions, and everything else about them. But thoughts are not analysable, not measurable, not weighable, except in a symbolic sense. There are fine thoughts and sordid thoughts; some that are poetic and others that are banal; we have cold thoughts and warm thoughts. But these classifications are all qualitative. Even when we refer to the *weight* of evidence in an argument it is only figurative. There is no actual method of weighing evidences, for we have no material instruments for reasoning and no atomic thought-tables. All we have are the forms of the syllogism.

I know that efforts are now being made to measure qualities in a quantitative manner, but with small success. If there be a scale for the emotion of anger, what are we to do with a man who *ought* to be angry, according to psychology, but who turns the other cheek to the smiter? He is a nuisance to progressive knowledge.

Take a different kind of illustration. Magna Charta and Lincoln's Gettysburg address are two of the best known pronouncements on human liberty. Which of the two has accomplished the greater influence? Which of the two has the larger volume of spiritual power in itself? These questions may be affected by patriotic motives; they may be traced in historic perspective; but, at the last, we



know quite well that we are trying to measure the immeasurable. . . .

Have you ever tried to assess personal values? A wealthy and prosperous merchant, philanthropically minded but much engrossed in business, makes himself responsible for the complete financing of a welfare mission in the slums of a great city. This mission is presided over by a man of scholarly attainments and fine character who is entirely dependent on his modest salary. Which of these two men has the greater moral merit? Is there any criterion for comparison as there is for measuring their respective bodies?

The mental world, often so difficult to separate from the world we call moral, presents the same inexactitude. Who can tell us to a decimal point whether Milton's *Paradise Lost*, or Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, has contributed a greater service to the ideal than Plato's *Republic* or the works of Rousseau? Criticism will give us a disquisition on their respective literary merits, and on the comparative value of their thought-contents; but their service to the mind of man, although susceptible to intelligent estimate, belongs to a world where statistics, formulæ, scales, and mechanical instruments have no place.

## VII

Again, is quantity in itself superior to quality? or equal? or inferior? If mind is superior to body, it may be inferred that a mental function is superior to a physical function. Isn't it a higher thing to think and to arrive at a mathematical discovery than to digest a beef-steak? If so, how is it higher? What is the standard? Spirit is above Nature. The beef-steak contributes its essence to the blood, and the blood feeds the brain, and the brain serves the mind: from physical to mental, and from mental to spiritual, is one chain, but the spiritual is at the summit—associated yet invisibly.

Then how do we gauge spiritual values? By their power, their truth, their beauty, and their service. These in turn are estimated in the light of their answer to the needs of man's nature. A revolutionary idea, a poetic fancy, a new philosophic principle, a scientific

generalization—these are judged according to the principles of the sphere to which they belong; but, in the last resort, it is not their power that decides our acceptance: it is their truth, their beauty and their service. Power may be seen temporarily in the evil forces at work, but their falsity, their ugliness, and their disservice ultimately deprive them of their power.

## VIII

Nature and Spirit are two worlds with striking analogies and still more striking contrasts. There is, for instance, the law of gravitation. In the spiritual sphere this is the immanence of God—his omnipresence.

Closer is He than breathing,  
And nearer than hands or feet.

If you defy gravity you will suffer; yet if you defy it skilfully, and mount up into the air for a flight in a safe machine, you will escape evil consequences. But is this a defiance of gravity, after all, or only a use of it? . . . And what is it to defy the law of spiritual gravitation? Can we escape if we are skilful? I ask these questions not to create difficulties, but to show how the effort to trace analogies and contrasts is sometimes misleading. An illustration from Nature of the working of a spiritual force is one thing; the claim for identity of law is another thing altogether.

Thus, in natural gravitation there is no partiality and no escape. The law acts. And it gives the required measure unfailingly. But the action of gravity in the world of Spirit appears to be a matter of individual responsibility. It is taken in large measure, in moderate measure, or not at all. The world of ideas is similar. Some men live in that world almost entirely; others do no more than take an occasional peep through the open door.

Heredity, for instance. Like produces like in the natural world, as we know from observation and experience; but moral character and spiritual insight are not directly transmitted. Isn't that why so much stress is placed on being born again, that is, born of the Spirit?

. . . Yet when we look for some spiritual analogy with the law of the conservation of energy we are not long before we find one. *Sowing and reaping*. What we put into life is returned again to us. But as an analogy it does not stand a close analysis; for, as in Nature, what we put into spiritual interests comes back to us with an increase. "To him that hath shall be given." The nearest approach of a spiritual idea to the conservation of energy is the law of Karma, which seems to promise justice in the results of personal actions, not here alone, but hereafter. And yet this law is said to give more to the individual than he puts into it. At the end his spiritual content has been increased and he enters Nirvana.

## IX

Contrast appears again in this; that nowhere in Nature do we find anything like the power of an idea *per se*. If Christ never lived—and there are always critics engaged in an effort to prove his existence mythical—how does it happen that a teacher without historic reality, as alleged, has done more for the regeneration of mankind than any other teacher who did exist? Dynamics in science, we know; but what of spiritual dynamics? Is the uplift in the realization of the idea more than in the historic fact, or in the story which embodies it? In Nature there is a continual transfer of energy, also transmutations from one element to another, but where are the effects that can be likened to the play of an idea in human consciousness?

Pascal has an interesting thought on this subject, "The least motion is of importance to all Nature; the entire sea changes for a stone. So, in grace, the least action is of importance in its consequences to all. Therefore, everything is important." Undoubtedly. But the law of spiritual influence is more intense and far-reaching than the corresponding law of Nature. Big Bertha fired its daily shell many miles into the air and it fell in Paris, wounding and killing; but nobody was hurt in Rome, or Madrid, or New York. Subtle effects in the atmosphere may have reached these places—who knows? But man does not disturb natural gravity except for a moment.

His actions do not increase it or abolish it. It remains constant.

Spiritual energy is different. A gravity of soul was created in Palestine two thousand years ago which has affected soul gravity everywhere. What we call a good action has repercussions greatly in excess of those we observe in Nature. There may be a superior amount of spiritual energy in one place and an inferior amount in another; which can only mean that in those places man has appropriated more, or less, of the immanent spirit of the Universe.

What I am anxious to stress is the inadvisability of reading the facts of the spiritual world solely in the light of the laws of the natural world. Spirit transcends Nature at every point. Drummond overlooked that fact, and tried to limit the life of the soul to analogies with observed processes like biogenesis, parasitism, and degeneration. No such cramping conceptions should find a place in your investigations.

But when all the similarities and differences between Nature and Spirit have been tabulated and analysed, there remains an impression of a deep and underlying relationship. Identities may be non-existent, but analogies are plentiful; and contrasts may be transcendencies, just as are the wings of the butterfly to the chrysalis left behind. A progressive creation, ever moving forward to new life, is certain to create events and pass through experiences which have no correspondences in the past.

I am going to close this letter with a few remarks on Joubert's memorable saying, "Close your eyes, that you may see." It is a saying which hides many secrets. It sounds like a paradox, yet it states a plain truth. Only by blotting out the visible can the invisible appear. The vanishing of the temporal reveals more clearly the facts of the eternal. . . . The difference between one generation and another, and one mind and another, is the difference between open eyes and closed eyes. The open eyes belong to natural science. They see and know. And the knowing is majestic in its extensive and intensive

achievements. But, unfortunately, many men of science appear to be devoted exclusively to the visible scene. Their knowledge is gained with open eyes and wideawake minds, and the manner becomes habitual. For men of this type it is hard to believe that there is a spiritual knowledge which comes from inward seeing; the notion is one that seems to convey a suggestion of mental degradation—as if blindness was superior to vision. But let us forget the figure of speech for a moment. Let us ask where knowledge dwells and where truth resides. Surely it is within. Kepler's laws of motion do not know that they exist and act. They are facts, but what we call the truth about them is in man's consciousness. A rose has not the slightest conception that it belongs to the order *Rosacæ*, yet it does, and the truth is in the mind of the botanist. All knowledge gained by research belongs finally to the spiritual order although its record is material, printed on superfine paper, and bound in morocco. A man of science has been known to see wonderful things in the dark hours of the night when his eyes were closed but unsleeping. Old trains of thought suddenly coalesced into new ideas, and the long sought vision appeared. So you see that even on the lines of pure reason the fact of seeing with closed eyes is not something abnormal.

## XI

But, says the critic, what is there to learn from this inward peering of the mind? Does not all knowledge begin with sense impressions? No, there are spiritual senses in addition to the physical senses of sight, hearing, taste and the rest of them. These fulfil their function in making us aware of spiritual facts just as the physical senses give us a knowledge of the external world. For instance, there is the poetic sense. It tells us of that region where the known and unknown meet. It is the light which never was on land or sea. You know what is meant but—how difficult it is to phrase your feelings!

Now there is but a short distance between the fact that poetical things are poetically discerned, and the fact that spiritual things are spiritually discerned; indeed, they are aspects of one and the same activity. You will

observe that it is discernment, not proof; vision not logic. Listen to Coleridge on Nature and Spirit:

It were a vain endeavour  
Though I should gaze for ever  
On the green light that lingers in the West;  
I may not hope from outward forms to win  
The passions and the life whose fountains are within.  
O Lady! we receive but what we give  
And in our own life alone doth Nature live.

You see what becomes of the visible Universe when the discerning eye of a poet looks through it to the reality behind it. The purpose of life can be no other than that of union with Spirit—a transition from the density of the material mass to the spirituality of the Eternal.

## XII

As for words, it will be wise to trace out the differences between comparison and contrast; and to get the meaning of the term cosmic ethics. *Æons*, conscience, interactionism, parallelism, psycho-therapeutic, psycho-analysis, quantitative, qualitative, generalization, and immanence, are key words. Study them closely.

Cordially yours,

## Questions and Problems

1. Write a brief note discussing the two following propositions:
  - (a) Nature is full of moral teaching.
  - (b) Nature is not moral, or immoral, but unmoral.
2. Is pain felt by the material body or the non-material mind? Where is the pain of an operation while the patient is under an anæsthetic?
3. If death is a fact of Nature, like birth, how do you explain the objection to death which is common to all mankind? "Skin for skin, what will a man give for his life?"

4. Can a man honestly believe he is ill, and yet not be ill? If so, is the origin of his belief purely mental? If not, the cause must be partly physical, and, in that event, he has real indisposition. Discuss this point.
5. In healing by suggestion, as depicted by responsible medical authorities, what exactly is the power that heals? Assuming that the disorder is functional and not organic, does an *idea* of health abolish the disorderly element? Or is it simply that a wrong idea, mischievously at work, is dispelled by the right idea?
6. The amount of natural energy, by conservation, remains ever the same; but the spiritual energy of man may be increased or decreased. The salvation of a city or of a nation may depend on the mentality and spirituality of its population. Ten righteous men were said to be numerous enough to save Sodom. How would you answer the objection that this is a quantitative measurement of good as a purifying agency?
7. What reasons would you put forward in justification of the priority of Spirit over Nature?
8. Can you find the meaning of Nature without resorting to Spirit? If so, how is the meaning stated? Is not Spirit the ultimate in everything?
9. George Russell (*Æ*), in *The Candle of Vision*, says: "Desire is hidden identity." In what sense?
10. J. Middleton Murry, in his *Pencillings*, writes: "We invite experimental psychologists to determine the length of an ideal poem." Is this a matter which experimental psychologists can decide? If so, what other mental or spiritual values can be determined?

## LETTER II

### The Principle of Authority

DEAR ROGER,

I can best introduce this topic by quoting a remark I heard not long ago. The speaker had been reading about *séances*, mediums, and the dead; and, after heaving a sigh, he said, "If a man like Sir Oliver Lodge, a great scientist, can believe all this, there must be some truth in it; and if the trained detective mind of Sir Conan Doyle is satisfied with the evidence, why should I not be satisfied, too?" This is a good illustration of the way in which the authority of great names influences judgment and helps in the formation of opinion. Is there not somewhere a list of all the most prominent men and women who accept Spiritualism, the intention being to aid the work of conversion? There is a similar list of great agnostics, and materialists, the unspoken logic of which is supposed to be, "Nobody can believe in a Deity now!" The Christians, not to be left behind, have drawn up tables of their own, and they invite comparisons with their competitors.

These lists do not impress me. It is as if the proponents of beliefs and unbeliefs stood before an immense weighing-machine, the avoirdupois of which would decide what is truth and what is not. Here, for instance, are the necromancers fresh from communion with the dead. They approach with jaunty step and load up one scale with persons of consequence. "There! Beat that." Then the Christians come forward. They load up the other scale with a colossal cargo of prominent deniers from everywhere, and down it goes, lifting the Spiritualists in the other scale into aerial isolation.



## II

Or it may chance that the militant Christian evidencers, keen for a contest, throw into one scale a mass of impressive authorities on behalf of Theism. Whereupon the rationalists, eager and aggressive, heave on to the other scale a bunch of heavy-weight agnostics with a truculent "Try to beat that." . . . These contests lead to nothing, unless it is to unseemly quarrels about the comparative merits of men of real distinction, who have no wish to figure in fights where the verdict might be well expressed in the phrase "My dog won."

But great names will always exercise influence on the judgment of those who are not so high in the intellectual scale. As a process, it saves a good deal of trouble in thinking out the issue for oneself. When great scientists are on the platform the humble spiritualist in the audience consoles himself with the reflection that he is in good company. These distinguished men know more than he does, and they know it better. Therefore . . .

## III

Such is the principle of authority *in action*. Now what is authority in itself? Let us go right down to the root of the matter. The word authority is not exactly an easy one, for it has several applications of a different order. It is generally defined as "the power derived from intellectual or moral superiority, from reputation, or from whatever else commands influence, respect, or esteem." The phrase "whatever else" is suggestive. The lexicographer despaired. He could not venture to include all authorities by name. They are too numerous. The authority on pictures, for instance; on drainage; on textual criticism; on bugs; on poultry; on poetics; on—everything. The world contains a bewildering mass of authorities and experts whose services are in more or less constant demand. Take an everyday case.

According to this morning's paper an osteopath in London says, "Turn in your toes and be healthier. It

is harmful to stand and walk with toes pointing outwards, as this throws the spine out of alignment, affects the hip bone, and modifies the entire nervous system." You pooh-pooh this argument to a friend, but he takes up a position against you. How do you propose to argue the point further? In all probability you cannot claim to have a superior knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and neurology obtained in practical training: and to bring forward cases known to you personally where men with feet "a quarter of three," like Charles Chaplin's, were strong healthy men, is futile for objectors who never knew your cases. Here, then, is an argument which you cannot handle satisfactorily out of your own knowledge; therefore, you go to authorities. You consult the volumes of men who stand high in their profession as anatomists, neurologists, and anthropologists; and very likely you get up a case which makes the original statement look foolish. You overcome the second-rater by the first-rater.

Now this method of pitting one authority against another is inevitable. Authorities are grouped in grades from 1 to  $\infty$ ; and if those of group 1 contradict a group much lower down, you may be sure that the belief of the world will follow the first group however strenuously the other group urges its case. Men follow those who have the soundest reputation for ability, knowledge, experience, and probity; but before the final decision is made there is much comparison of the authorities who are at variance; and the criterion at the finish is often *probability*. In numerous instances this probability is all we can get; and it is defined as "the chance of any proposition or supposition as more likely to be true than false." Cicero's saying that "probability is the very guide to life" is as true now as on the day he wrote it.

# V

But in this letter we are thinking more particularly of authority in religion and philosophy. There is, of course, a great difference between the two, and the idea of an authority in the person of a philosopher who tells us imperatively what we are to think is not a little diverting.

Authority in philosophy is mainly confined to schools.

the masters of which may have gained the respect of opposing schools, but nothing more than that. Every philosopher is said to be a Platonist, or an Aristotelean, these two masters being looked upon as representing the two chief trends of thought; yet their authority is not of a kind which *decides* an issue. Their views are judged as keenly as any others, and just as readily set aside if believed to be erroneous.

Perhaps Kant, of all philosophers, has the greatest amount of authority, mainly because of the impregnable positions he established. When the movement towards materialism becomes pronounced we invariably hear the phrase "Back to Kant." He is the one philosopher of mind against matter, the strenuous thinker whose results, in part at least, could win the good opinion of men like Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, so far removed as they were from Kantian morality.

Authority in matters of philosophy depends entirely on the appeal to reason. Schopenhauer believed his system to be the only true system, and he said so in very plain language; but his claims were not accepted because he made them; they were subjected to valuation, and his treatment of problems was accorded a high place both for contents and form. But men felt at liberty to say yes or no just as much as if they were called upon to decide the existence or non-existence of the man in the moon.

## VI

Authority in the Christian religion is a more complicated matter. There are, as you know, two main sources: first, the authority of the Churches which claim historical continuity; next, the principle of private judgment. I do not wish to argue these claims. I prefer to state the facts as they appear to me. Any institution which by its doctrines announces a monopoly of spiritual laws is acting contrary to the spirit of truth. This monopoly may be seen in the particularist rite of some obscure sect, or in the comprehensive ministry of a great ecclesia. But the spirit and the letter are the same. They have one meaning: "We alone have the truth."

Now spiritual laws are like natural laws in this sense: nobody can "corner" them. Has anyone attempted to

monopolize gravitation? or the laws of growth? Does the rain descend on the gardens of the just and avoid the cornfields of the unjust? Nature's laws are for everybody. So are the laws of Spirit. There is no organization anywhere with the power to impart or withhold divine influences. The idea itself is offensive. The fact would be intolerable. A law is a law, not the exclusive perquisite of a group.

The attempts to confine God to places have been proved to be a failure. Jerusalem, even in apostolic days, fought hard for this distinction; and, it looked at first as if a man who lived at Antioch must enter the kingdom of God via the city of David—that is, by circumcision. But the direct route won. Was not God everywhere? Why then traverse miles of territory in search of the Supreme? It had been said long before that “neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall men worship the Father . . . but in spirit and in truth.” Places? No. You cannot confine God within an ancient city, or within the four walls of a modern church. He is everywhere. The divine attributes can suffer no restriction from time or space. Grace is too ethereal to be entrusted to the eccentricities of man and the uncertainties of history.

The truth is that “God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.” Thus St. Peter. He was an open air man, with an open air mind, and an open air theology. His words have the real signature of universality. They ring true with the catholicism of Nature and Spirit.

## VII

There are three sources of authority in religion: the inner light, the Scriptures, and experience. These combine to produce confidence and certainty. They constitute the principle of private judgment, a term that does not commend itself to me as being accurately descriptive. It is rather a personal conviction resulting from instinctive feeling and reasoned analysis. It is the individual stand against privilege and a class. But in the long run it is a principle or method which is used by everybody, even those who decide to accept the authority

of Rome. When St. George Mivart, man of science and philosopher, accepted Catholic claims, it was an act of private judgment. It could not have been anything else. The historic argument overwhelmed him, and he yielded. But later, when the principles of science reasserted themselves, he found himself in conflict with his ecclesiastical authorities. What was to him illogical remained illogical, and no clerical pronouncements could stultify the laws of thought. Private judgment conducted him into the fold, and private judgment led him out again.

## VIII

What is it that makes authority in religion a matter of dispute, contention, strife, anger, and heated controversy? It is the use of the word *infallibility*. If instead of infallibility the Church had been satisfied with the word *certainty*, the whole course of ecclesiastical history would have been changed. For, after one Church set up the claim to supremacy, the seceding Church set up the claim for an infallible Bible. Both infallibles had a hard time of it to explain discrepancies, seeming and real; and all the while the only true infallibles were within the mind and heart of man. Is the evidence that St. Peter ever went to Rome as infallible as the axioms of Euclid? Is the date of the birth of Christ as infallibly true as the laws of thought? In asking these questions I am doing no more than emphasize the certainties of experience in contrast with the uncertainties of history. Does it matter that we do not know much about St. Peter's travels, or the exact date of the birth of Christ?

Is it not true that, as Whichcote said, nothing that is *necessary* in religion is *uncertain*? Have we not met with unlettered ploughmen who were spiritual scholars despite the fact that they did not know what language Christ used when He spoke His parables, and had never heard of the Council of Nicea? Is the faith of such men "unauthorized"? Assuredly not. This authority is found in that composite already referred to; they have followed the inner light, they have studied the writings of the Old and New Testaments, and they have realized the truth by experiment, than which there is no higher authority. If a thing is not true in the conscious experi-

ence of the individual, he has no alternative but to rule it out.

Religion is inevitably connected with history, but is not dependent on it; in fact the false importance attached to history is the reason why one Church unchurches another Church, and why men have been burned alive in the defence of their creeds. One could well say, "Oh, History, what crimes have been committed in thy name!"

## IX

To-day I opened my newspaper to find an illuminating contribution from a London correspondent on the disturbed conditions in the Anglican Church. In it there is one very suggestive sentence where, in speaking of seekers after truth, he says that "they do not want liberty to believe anything—which has led to chaos—but authority to believe something." Therein you have an accurate description of a certain type of mind. It is looking for a certainty which it cannot find for itself—or which thinks it cannot—and therefore any authority in the position to justify some form of faith will be very welcome.

What happens to such people? As a rule they follow the leadings of their mental temperament. If they are super-impressed by the idea of unity, or historic continuity, or ritual, they will find their way into associations where these things come first. If they are literalists, and willing to build a whole skyscraper of thought on a single passage of Scripture, they will drift into some sect where such an adventure is easy of accomplishment. But there are others who demand a religion with social warmth in it, just as there are others again who will sacrifice the warmth for the sake of cold and conscious theological accuracy. Both find their way into appropriate groups. Between the Church and its members there is ever a conformity to type.

In this sense every man who is truly identified with his Church may be said to think for himself. He follows

the leading of temperament and of early associations. But this does not deliver him from various theological controversies. For instance, it may be said that his Church is schismatic; that he is relying on a Scripture that is not inerrant; and that he is therefore working against the true authority and not with it. What is he to do? He must once more think for himself. He has a whole world of authority within him if he only knew it.

As a beginning, let him take the self-evident truth, or the laws of thought. Does he need anyone to certify these things before he can be sure of them? On whose authority does he agree that things that are equal to the same thing are equal to one another? Is it solely because Euclid said it? If a philosopher declared that the first law of thought—whatever is, is—was sometimes suspended, would our inquirer be utterly unable to deny the statement from his own knowledge? No. He would be as confident as he is in politics. Government is a difficult art, and yet no voter, male or female, ever appears to consult one great authority about the issues of an election. Self-reliance is the rule.

## XI

Yet there are hundreds of people who have a longing for certainty in religion. Whence comes their uncertainty? From inability to answer their own questions, or the arguments of opponents; but more from a lack of spiritual understanding. I have no space for the examination of such questions and arguments; and it would not be fair to the institutions they concern to offer anything but a full discussion of both sides. So I desist. But I will say that personal experience is the corner-stone of all authority in religion. . . . This experience, it may be objected, would appear to sanctify strange forms of error. Yes, that is the *appearance*. But there is an underlying spiritual unity, just as there is an underlying national unity in political parties. Tories, Liberals, and Socialists are often diametrically opposed in policy, but they are all British, and they all seek Great Britain's good, although the Socialist's "good" may be synonymous with the Tory's "evil." Are political differences "errors"? Possibly, but a uniformity obtained by com-

pulsion would be contrary to the spirit and practice of British ideals. Difference of opinions and convictions, followed by a struggle for mastery, are accepted as normal and right.

However much you deplore sectarianism, and however eagerly you welcome proposals for unity, any corporate embodiment which does not allow individual freedom, and which not only asks but compels submission to a group, is contrary to the spirit of faith.

## XII

I have re-read this letter, and think that it contains substantially what I wanted to say, although there is much I have had to omit. Authority is a large subject, and I gave instances of some of its secular as well as ecclesiastical associations. But Nature and Spirit are governed by laws which cannot be monopolized by individuals or groups. Grace and the sunshine are alike for all.

Yet, strange to say, profound difficulties have arisen. Confusions and intricacies have been so multiplied that instead of an instinctive response to spiritual facts, we are asked to investigate historical evidence, to compare dogmas, to weigh authorities, and to find infallibility. Instead of the mind of the child being necessary to enter the Kingdom, we must have the mind of the scholar. Out of this controversial condition has arisen much uncertainty. Average minds are often perplexed as to what is truth and what is error in this babel of authorities. . . . I have suggested that we look within. Nothing that is necessary in religion is uncertain. There may be reasonable doubts about certain ecclesiastical events in history. There need be none about personal experience.

To Kant the two wonders of life were the starry heavens above and the moral law within. In the search for authority there is one centre on which your attention should be focused: *within*.

## XIII

The list of words this time is not a long one. Included are these: theism, neurology, anthropologist, probity,



probability, historical continuity, particularist, grace, principle, private judgment, ecclesiastical, infallibility. unauthorized, literalist, schismatic, inerrant, laws of thought, sectarianism.

As usual there are some inviting studies. *Principle* is popular enough. We all use it. And yet it is a word of profound meaning. Compare it with its synonyms. *Probability* contains a whole section of the world's thought. You will learn to distinguish it from *probabilism*.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

1. What would you say is the difference, speaking intellectually, between deciding how to vote at the next election and deciding the issue: Adult *versus* Infant Baptism? What authority do you use in each issue?
2. If St. Paul towers above St. Peter as an Apostle, and as one who did more to formulate doctrine and practice than any of the twelve, are we justified in giving him more authority? or is the authority of the Apostles equal? If not, why? If so, who gave them this equality?
3. Leibnitz said that "if our immediate internal experience could possibly deceive us, there could no longer be for us any truth of fact, nay, any truth of reason." Discuss this emphatic statement as to the authority of consciousness, and consider it in relation to the perceptions of spiritual truth which, like the activity of conscience, require no further evidence of their existence.
4. "There can be no doubt that, in philosophy, a cat has a right to look at a king, and has also the right to point out his misdoings, if such there be. . . . The authority of the critic is a matter of no moment where the evidence is given. . . . Beware of authority in philosophy, and, above all, beware of that most insidious form of authority, the spirit of the 'school.' It cannot but narrow our sympathies and

restrict our outlook." (Fullerton's *Introduction to Philosophy*.) If you substitute the words *religion* and *Church* for *philosophy* and *school*, what similarities and differences can you detect in the two viewpoints?

5. "If you believed that you alone had the truth, and that men were in grave danger because of the errors from which your truth would save them, would you not adopt Spartan methods of trampling down difficulties in order to save people in spite of themselves?" (From a letter.) Discuss this point, which appears to be a version of the old saying that an exclusive Church is a persecuting Church.
6. How would you answer this question: Is there such a thing as an amateur in religion? A man who obtains some kind of divine recognition—a sort of second-class certificate—while the others, the real professionals, get first-class, or full recognition? Has God a classification of Christians?
7. "In illness you need a physician; in legal trouble you need a lawyer; in financial worries you need an adviser; so in religious difficulties you need the one authority." Where is the fallacy here? Is there one physician, one lawyer, one financial adviser as it is suggested there is one Supreme religious authority? Why not many authorities in religion as in the others?
8. "I think I ought to tell you that the Devil heals just as many on the other side of the Lake." (Remark made by the pastor of a Faith Healing Church in Zurich. See Dr. A. T. Schofield's *Behind the Brass Plate*.) Analyse this statement as to (a) its intellectual honesty, and (b) its meaning as to healing processes that are mental.

## LETTER III

### Factors that Affect Conclusions

DEAR ROGER,

There is a passage in Professor Rendel Harris's *Union with God* which opens up an interesting question. It reads thus:

"A friend of mine said, after seeing the great Dresden Madonna—'I don't see how anyone can look at that picture and be a Unitarian.' The picture had provoked the thought on the artistic side of life which the whole story of Christ was meant to suggest on the historical side."

I have often had occasion to recall this remark. Can art be a proof of historical fact and theological accuracy? In short, is impressiveness a guide to truth?

The notion is doubtless familiar to you, but have you followed it out to its possibilities? If not, let us see where it will take us. Suppose we enter a Roman Catholic Cathedral and witness the elaborate ritual of High Mass. There is much to impress the eye, the ear, and the imagination: noble architecture, music that arouses the heart, symbolism that delights us because of its analogies with the soul of things.

But does this impressiveness establish the truth of the dogmas on which the service rests? Professor Harris himself would not have admitted so much. . . . Suppose we enter some mountain sanctuary in Kentucky, or some Scotch kirk in the Grampians, there to listen to solemn singing and a discourse on the difference between justification and sanctification. A certain simple dignity marks this worship, but few would call it impressive to the eye, the ear, or the imagination. Does the absence of the impressive element render the singing abortive and the devotion untrue?

## II

It seems to me now that a panoplied error can live as long and exercise as much influence as a majestic truth. Impressiveness in itself has, of course, nothing to do with truth or error. We may be greatly impressed by the rendering of a Chopin prelude, or by the marvellous performance of a trapeze artist, but there is no question of truth involved. It is only when impressiveness enters into those difficult questions about which mankind has ever debated that it begins to weave the web of illusion, thereby imposing upon us the necessity of distinguishing between the real fact and that artistic embodiment which imparts to it a most inviting charm. I remember a man of sceptical tendencies who on every possible occasion went to hear Gounod's *Redemption*, because, he said, it proved to him that Christ rose from the dead. The music was more than a match for his doubts. Arius, that most troublesome of all heretics, was shrewdly aware of this fact in religious psychology. He gave to the dry technicalities of his heresy the impressive significance of melody; and his hymns brought him numerous followers which no dialectic could have secured.

Has not Christianity itself been kept alive by its hymn-writers, its mystics, and its great preachers? The massive tomes of Puritan divinity repose on dusty shelves, but Toplady's "Rock of Ages" is still vital. Newman's argument about the illative sense is wrongly ignored, while his "Lead, Kindly Light" continues to be the language of modern devotion. . . . Oh, yes, the appeal to the senses is one that has not been overlooked, and I should like to read a critical estimate of the respective places occupied by sight and hearing—the pictorial and the musical—in this long historical development.

## III

But I am digressing. . . . The point I wish to bring out is this: that every man in the search for truth will meet Impressiveness, and, to use an everyday phrase, will have to decide what he is going to do about it. Will

he say, "What is impressive to *me* will, on that account, set up for itself a claim for consideration?" Will he declare, "Impressiveness lies in the idea as well as in its historical embodiment." Or will he say, "Logic alone can impress me?"

In any case, the impressive element, taken by itself, is not likely to be conclusive. It often needs a corrective. The Psalm writer, after viewing the wonders of the starry heavens, was so impressed that he became sceptical. He did not think that man could hope for any attentions from Deity. "What is man? or the son of man?" But reflective analysis came to the rescue. . . . There followed a period of thought. . . . And then it dawned upon him that, after all, man was little lower than the angels. The stars had nearly killed him. Reason and insight raised him up.

#### IV

Have you ever noticed the impressiveness of what might be called *Mental Thunder*? To some people it is very wonderful. There is the economic species which the Communists let out against Capitalism. Boom! There is the thunder of immorality, intended to overawe the folks who still cling to the decencies of life. Boom! There is the thunder of the debunkers—loud, persistent, and cheap. . . . Boom, boom!

The theory is that to get attention, and to conquer, you must have thunder and plenty of it. The Tory who holds fast to proved experience has to contend with the thunder of the Liberal: the Liberal has to explain away the thunder of the Socialist: the Socialist does his best to offset the thunder of the Bolshevik: and Bolshevism itself is turned into a kind of piety by the crashing thunder of the Anarchist. Between the diehard Tory and the die-easy Anarchist there is enough "advanced thought" to sink a battleship. And there is enough thunder to awe the entire world. But what of the lightning?

You will hear all sorts of mental thunder, and you will not always be fearful of it or impressed by it. There is the thunder of statistics, for instance. The churches are alleged to be losing their influence, and figures are

quoted as evidences of decline. Society is declared to be rotten and politics corrupt to the core. In fact the whole country is going to the bow-wows. And statistics are said to prove it. Don't be too easily impressed by showy arguments. We are to-day relying too much on figures, charts, and graphs. Even business men are awakening to the fact. When David was punished for numbering Israel, I imagine that his crime was the danger of reliance upon *heads* instead of *ideas*. In the last resort it is the idea which conquers, not material in the mass.

Then is the real undisputed truth never impressive? Yes, undoubtedly. Take truth in the form of fact. The law of gravity which holds the unnumbered solar systems together, and yet does not scorn the smallest atom, will never fail in its appeal to the imagination. The energy of radium, consuming yet unconsumed, will always retain its power to impress the beholder. But if I take a fact of a different kind I get a different reaction. "All men are mortal." Is there anything impressive in *that*? Rightly understood the mortality of the race is a fact which does not cause merriment. It may arouse sympathy, even protest when the story of human suffering is linked with it. But the final feeling when we behold the march of man through history—birth, life, and death—is one that appeals to our sense of wonder. The element of the tragic is there, and all tragedy is impressive.

Take the fact that there is an Eternal Energy behind all visible phenomena. Try to imagine it. You have not imagined more than a few minutes before you become possessed with the feelings of immensity and infinity. Here, then, truth and impressiveness are found in intimate association. This is no question of belief or unbelief. The Eternal Energy exists, and the effort to apprehend its nature, and its manifestations, is one that induces a natural feeling of awe. That feeling becomes profound when reason compels us to think that the Eternal in contrast with our own limited consciousness and intelligence must possess these powers in supernatural degree.

It is not necessary to know the Eternal in the same way that we know our bodies, or even our minds. We can say that we know gravitation or electricity; but, in

fact, we do not know very much about either. Again, we know some things in the form of conclusions and in no other way. Thus Heisenberg and Compton dispute the uniformity of the physical world; and believe in an effective intelligence which controls Nature and life. They have little to say about this Supreme Mind; its nature is beyond their power to understand. Yet they accept its existence. And both men are in the front rank of investigating physicists.

## V

Among the mental factors which have a tendency to turn us away from the truth is the *love of unity*. You have seen it already in your reading of science, literature, philosophy, art, and religion. Let a man once get the idea of a *system*, and, unless he is judicial, he will crush and squeeze every fact that refuses to enter into it easily and naturally. The creed of the system-maker is that all rebels must be straight-jacketed into obedience. If you ever conceive of an idea which slowly assumes the outline of a system, you will begin to feel sure you possess a gigantic originality in embryo, and you will do what all your predecessors have done: you will pooh-pooh inconvenient facts.

In philosophy "the one and the many" is an old, old story, and it has more than one application. Millions and millions of separate facts present themselves to the human mind, and it yearns to classify and unite them into a great whole. This desire is good in itself. It is indeed the aim of all thought, for, as the Platonists used to say, "All knowledge is the gathering up into one." But it has dangers. One is that of stupid enthusiasm for a unifying formula that is unsound. Condillac provides an example. A philosopher believed he had discovered a principle which would explain chemical phenomena, but a competent chemist told him that his facts were the converse of what he had supposed them to be. "Well, then," said the philosopher, "tell me what they are so that I may explain them on my system." Speaking in everyday parlance: "Can you beat it?" There is one reason why the multitude eagerly accepts cure-all medicines and explain-all gospels. The many are reduced

to one. There is a single remedy for every disease. A key is provided to unlock every door. A word, a phrase—and all secrets are revealed! As the advertisements say, "It is so easy." Take astrology, which claims that the pages of your life are written in the stars. As a pseudo-science it has a respectable list of distinguished disciples. Kepler, for instance. It was the love of unity which predisposed him to accept the theory that the positions of the stars spell good or evil for poor humanity. And if a great mind like Kepler's can be attracted out of its rational orbit, there is some excuse for men and women of less calibre. If you care to put some of the prevailing philosophical and scientific fads through the process of cross-examination, you will find that resistant facts are either explained away or pushed into a corner.

## VI

Another distinctive factor is that of *order*. Like the rest of us you may get your emphases wrong, and put second things where first things ought to be. This suggests a thought to which I would have you give special attention, namely, the proper recognition of *importance*. To be able to distinguish the important from the unimportant, and to act accordingly, is the wisdom of the wise. And the one way to this excellence is by placing the factors of life in their true order. Plato has an apt paragraph on this subject.

"The cause of all impiety and irreligion among men is that, reversing in themselves the relative subordination of mind and body, they have, in like manner, in the universe, made that to be first which is second, and that to be second which is first; for while, in the generation of things, intelligence and final causes precede matter and efficient causes, they, on the contrary, have viewed matter and material things as absolutely prior, in the order of existence, to intelligence and design; and thus, departing from an original error in relation to themselves, they have ended in the subversion of the Godhead."

The cause is obvious. Body hungers and desires are insistent. The lust of the eye and the pride of life are assertive, and assume a leadership to which they have no



just claim. It is the old story of the material lording it over the spiritual. Look at modern life with penetrating vision and you will see that its predominating errors are due to a false sense of importance. Primary things are made secondary. First things are relegated into the background. What those first things are you will have no difficulty in deciding. My object in mentioning them here is to show how the table of values affects vital convictions.

## VII

In a previous letter I referred to prejudice. Here the subject comes to the surface again; a prejudice *for* and a prejudice *against*. There are men who have the Will to Believe, and others who have the Will to Deny. The believers say "yes" easily. Just as easily the deniers say "no." And both enjoy doing it. In each case the tendency is two-thirds mental and one-third physical. Its source is in the make-up of the personality. I do not say that it is wholly right or wholly wrong. Manifestly, there are natural believers who will believe anything. There are others who are keenly critical. Similarly, there are deniers who would like to deny their own existence, so lovingly do they support anything negative. But there are others of that type who, because they follow reason, have rendered real critical services to mankind.

What, more exactly, is a believer and what is a denier? To say that a believer is a man whose instincts are positive, and that the denier is a negative man, does not carry us very far. The believer accepts life with few reservations. Negations do not appeal to him. He has the affirmative intellect. He would rather say Yes than No. Optimism, to him, is more fundamental than pessimism. He sees imperfections everywhere, but the world is moving forward. . . . The denier is different. He holds that accepted opinions are mostly wrong. He has a horror of conformity. The mind of the crowd nauseates him. Carlyle's description of a great population as "mostly fools" is to his taste. Carlyle knew his stuff! The denier is one of the few in the Sardis of Iconoclasm who have not soiled their garments with uplift work, or with moral indignations.

Now every man will follow the bent of his nature. If he be a natural believer, he will somehow find his way into that form of faith, sacred or secular, which for him holds the truth. If he be a denier, he may still possess positive elements in the form of aggression, but he will inevitably tread the road which leads to identity with his kind. . . . The journey for both men is occasionally hesitating. Some turn back. Others change over.

You will have to think out the situation for yourself. But remember: the men who have done most for the world have been believers. The ages of faith have been the greatest—not the routine faith of the Middle Period in Europe, but the motivating faith of new vision, both spiritual and material.

### VIII

Suggestibility, in its varying degrees, is another factor which must be taken into account. Are you easily impressed by a table of statistics? or a highly ingenious theory of spiritual essences? or a plea for the increase of personal power by means of a formula? If so, you will have need to develop the critical side of your nature.

It is agreed that a condition of low suggestibility has disadvantages, such as an undue measure of negation, a lack of faith and movement, and often an open cynicism that leads nowhere. But high suggestibility has also its disadvantages, such as an eager readiness to accept the *ipse dixit* of others, a disposition to move with the crowd when it gets a new idea, and an uncritical absorption of prevailing gospels.

There is in the life of the world an unconscious tendency to imitate others; and when the others who take up a doctrine are numbered by tens of thousands, that fact alone exercises a "pull." Its force is felt without conscious argument, and according to the degree of our natural suggestibility, we respond to the pull or decline it.

### IX

The phrase, "I have learned from experience that . . ." is one which will probably give you some

trouble: for, when the lesson that somebody has learned is the converse of what you have learned from your own experience, you can do little to change the opinion of the other man; assuming, of course, that you are confident that he is in the wrong. I have met men with queer records of misfortune, and their conclusions about the nature of justice are naturally of a profoundly negative character. I think they have made a mistake. . . . It has its basis in misjudged suffering. To interpret rightly one's own personal experience is one of the first arts of life. It calls for patience, a knowledge of spiritual laws, a regard for the rights of others, and a faith in the Supreme.

In this connection I sometimes think of Emerson's first book on *Nature*. Five hundred copies of it were printed, and at the end of ten years the full edition had not been sold. What would a modern author say if a like event happened to him? What would a modern book publisher do if a small edition hung fire? Yet the sage himself was unperturbed. It did not make him bitter. He did not attack society because it was neglecting a genius. Man might refuse to buy his book on *Nature*, but he believed that "man was on his way to all that is true and good."

But opinions and convictions may be improperly affected by exalted experiences as well as experiences of a depressing character. In moments of high sensation, bodily or mental, there is a disposition to conclude that "this is the life": and to strive for frequent repetitions. An overwhelming love of religious ecstasy *per se* has sometimes ended in loss of mental balance, just as an overwhelming love of system may end in loss of vital truth. To be master of emotional rhythms means not only an increase of personal power: it means a greater likelihood of clear mental vision.

That some of our conclusions are affected by physical factors is not so obvious, for men in all grades of health and disease have endorsed the same creeds—religious, social, literary, and economic. The truth lies deeper

down. Take the subject of sex. Advocates of an advanced code of sex ethics are pretty sure to belong to one of two types: the oversexed or the undersexed. The first type is against orthodox restraint because a constitutional asymmetry has given sex an undue prominence in thought. The second type, with an intellectual but warm love of toleration, plus a coldness of physical impulse which hides the danger of liberty in excess, joins the company of those who demand that adultery shall be a sin no more. Thus, there are men with the temperament of a libertine, albeit held in leash, who unite with other men of almost ascetic habit, to popularize proposals which society regards as inimical to its safety. And the primary affective influence is in bodily constitution.

Dr. Alfred Adler is the one authority who claims that physical defects always promote intellectual and moral benefit. He even goes so far as to say that, "one of the greatest advantages to an individual is to be born with defective organs. . . . The great accomplishments, the really worth while achievements, have been made by individuals whose equipment was poor." But we have not read of a puny Plato, an anæmic Aristotle, a sickly Shakespeare, or a gouty Goethe. Was not Leonardo da Vinci a man of superb physical strength? It is admitted that Lombroso's list of defective men of genius is a long one, and that there have been men like R. L. Stevenson, who did better work in illness than in comparatively good health. But this is different from setting up a theory that defect is an excellence in disguise. . . .

However, there can be little doubt that defect does exercise an influence on the formation of opinion: still, *a priori*, it cannot be regarded as a better influence than that of health and symmetry together, otherwise disease would have to be enthroned. An inferiority complex may beget an ambition which in its turn begets effort, leading to ultimate success: and yet, the greatest of men have become great not because they felt dwarfed by other men, but because they had in them a consummate ability for art, or science, or philosophy, or leadership.

## XI

To recapitulate. One must watch the effect of the impressive element on judgment, realizing that error as well as truth may appear in gorgeous raiment, and with solemn ceremonial. . . . This impressive element may incline the mind to credulity or incredulity. . . . It may assume the form of Beauty, or it may manifest itself as mental thunder.

Another factor affecting opinion is the love of unity, whereby facts are improperly treated in order to complete a *system*; and placing the facts and forces of life in the wrong order, whereby first things do not come first, is still another agency productive of error.

The prejudice of temperament—with its will to believe, or its will to deny—is a potent cause of differences in beliefs and mental attitudes; and one form of it is seen in the varying degrees of suggestibility.

Experience itself, unless rightly interpreted, is a fruitful form of misjudgments, which, because of their origin, are deeply ingrained in consciousness. Physical factors that decide the trend of conviction may not be numerous, but they are decided in action. Sex, for instance. And those bodily defects, which in the opinion of Dr. Adler are the origin of inferiority complexes, are certainly insistent. They arouse protest, which is followed by systematic effort to atone for the loss entailed by the shortcomings of the body.

Some of the issues arising out of these considerations are included in "Questions and Problems." These you will analyse. And, as always, "think for yourself."

## XII

The chief words and phrases of this letter are: historical fact; symbolism; analogies; dogma; impressiveness; illusion; illative sense; unity; system; embryo; "the many and the one"; directive factor; importance; excellence; prejudice; will to believe and deny; negations; affirmative intellect; conformity; iconoclasm; suggestibility; formula; spiritual laws; asymmetry; inferiority complex; genius; *a priori*; temperament. If I have

repeated a word from previous lists, it is because it may have been used in a different association.

Thinking is facilitated by the use of terms which help in defining boundaries: and, in consequence, the proper meaning of every word should be mastered.

You will find many other factors at work in the formation of opinion—some of them helpful, some of them a hindrance. Make careful notes of these discoveries.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

1. Carlyle, in his *Note Books*, offers an interesting remark on prejudice. "He who would understand England must understand her Church, for that is half of the whole matter. Am I not conscious of a prejudice on that side? Does not the very sight of a shovel hat in some degree indispose me to the wearer thereof? This must be looked into: without love there is no knowledge." Why not? Show the effect of hate upon the knowing processes.
2. "You cannot reasonably take a book that was written two thousand years ago and treat it as if it were written last month. Its mental atmosphere, its antiquity, its arguments, render it illusive." Examine this statement, and consider it in relation to (a) *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, (b) the *Upanishads*, and (c) the Old Testament.
3. Dr. Fosdick writes: "A prominent fundamentalist brought a mass meeting of his fellows to tumultuous cheers by the climatic assertion, 'I would rather have my own son learn his A B C's in Heaven than know Greek in Hell!'" In your opinion, what was the cause of the enthusiasm with which the remark was received? What is the opposition expressed in the speaker's preference?

4. Herbert Spencer, in speaking of death as a total extinction of personality, refers to "the thought, so strange and so difficult to realize, that with death there lapses both the consciousness of existence and the consciousness of having existed." How far did the philosopher here requisition intellect and feeling in the endeavour to arrive at a judgment? Is not the "thought" of his mind infinitely more than a precise effort of logical reasoning?
5. Voltaire writes: "I meditated last night . . . one must be mad not to worship the intelligence which directs these vast forces. . . ." Write a brief analysis of this meditation, showing (a) the effect of the working of Nature's great forces on the imagination, (b) the reason, (c) the feelings of a man who is regarded as the prince of sceptics.
6. Outline cases, in the form of fact or fiction, when an emotional excess in the form of (a) pride, (b) fear, (c) love, or some other affective influence, modified the course of thought and conclusion.
7. "All readers of Dostoevsky will call to mind . . . how terribly this central fact of pain haunted Dostoevsky. It was, I think, the main source of his disbelief. Yet he was at the same time consumed with a desire to believe. . . . This emotional dilemma is one with which most people have struggled in their own experiences." (I. A. Richards in *The Forum*, July 1927.) How do you explain this dilemma, and what is the solution, if any?
8. "I have come to the conclusion, after years of observation, and after suffering many injustices, that in this world, at any rate, there is no system of material or spiritual law which rights every wrong." Assuming that the writer of the letter, from which this is taken, is correct in his facts, is he correct in the inferences drawn from those facts? If he is, what further reflections have you to offer? If he is wrong, in your opinion, how would you show that every wrong is righted?
9. In *Writers at Work*, by Louise Morgan, there occurs this sentence from the late Edgar Wallace: "I know a lot about women but I never dare write it." Imagine a series of possible reasons why.
10. Professor Compton says, "If freedom of choice is

admitted, it follows by the same law of reasoning that one's thoughts are not the result of molecular reactions obeying fixed physical laws." Then what is it which chooses? If choice is organic, is a murderer in any way responsible?



## LETTER IV

### Why Some Thoughts Make Us "Dizzy"

DEAR ROGER,

I replied direct to the query in your friend's letter about the inevitable difficulty of the concept of the Infinite. I told him that his "feeling of reeling," as he called it, was normal, unless it was unpleasant to experience and depressive in its results. I am here amplifying my notes to your friend.

Ribot, the French psychologist, when referring to the *Lalitavistara*, wherein Buddha is described as having experienced 10,000,000,000 *kalpas*, said, "This makes me dizzy." Was it something in the notion of a *kalpa* that caused the dizziness, or was it the thought of a human consciousness enduring ten billion years? Or was it both? . . . I may say that a *kalpa* is the interval of time between the creation and the destruction of a universe. and is thus a quite inconceivable period of duration in the sense of realizing it as we realize fifty or one hundred years. So when Ribot tried to imagine ten billion intervals he failed, and complained that the effort made him dizzy. But we must not take the word too literally. He was not compelled to steady himself by leaning against the wall, or holding on to his chair. All he meant was that he felt a confusion while attempting to compass the idea; that the idea resisted efforts to comprehend it, and that this resistance caused a kind of intellectual distress.

Herbert Spencer used a different word to express an experience which was similar though not identical. "The thought of infinite space," he wrote, "in comparison with which our sidereal system dwindles to a mere point, appals me." Appalling and dizzying are not synonymous terms, but they are both indicative of

mental impotence. So is the saying of Pascal: "The eternal silence of these infinite spaces frightens me. . . ." Your friend's question, and yours in part, narrows down to this: "Can we try to comprehend the Infinite without confusion?"

## II

Philosophers have always answered No. But we can *perceive* the Infinite, and *apprehend* it, not only without confusion but with satisfaction. To try to *think* it, is to try to comprehend it. For this we have no proper powers. The Infinite is too big for us. No man can see God face to face and live. But even the Infinite, apart from the conception of a First Cause, is beyond our capacity, that is, the Infinite in its positive aspect. Negatively, we find it easy to negotiate. Take numbers. There was a time during the inflation of Russian and German currency when men talked and exchanged in billions, trillions, and quadrillions of rubles and marks. without being worth very much in comparison.

I will write down a quadrillion in figures representing English pounds, thus: £567,892,415,228,679,031. As a number it has *exactitude*, because it can be easily changed. One figure added or subtracted would make it altogether different. But you could double it without comprehending either the original amount, or the enlarged amount. All we know about it is that it is a huge sum. Already it has left the indefinite behind and approached the Infinite. Yes, the Infinite, for, as Professor Keyser says, in his *Mathematical Philosophy*, "Science is indeed the study of infinity." And in atomology it is becoming the study of the invisible.

## III

That star which is called the sixty-first of Cygnus is so far away from us that its light takes nine years to reach the earth. Does anyone pretend to say that he can comprehend that distance? I think not. We can readily grasp the idea of a thousand miles, but the comparative millions of miles which separate us from the other

members of the solar system are barely negotiable notions: hence, a distance such as that just referred to is beyond us. What, then, must be our idea of the distance of Capella, which takes seventy-two years for its rays to strike the earth's atmosphere? And what of the still greater distances of stars which astronomers say require millions of years before their presence can be made known? . . . Now here we are engaged with the facts of the visible universe, and these facts are so vast as to be incomprehensible in themselves, although, as measured in relation to other facts, their existence is completely realized. Is it at all remarkable, then, that the Infinite as Creative Cause compels the mind to abandon its attempt to embrace all that is embodied in the idea?

Have you ever talked about this matter with an average man of good character and true religious experience? If not, seek such a man and cross-examine him. Assume, if you like, the attitude of a sceptic, and say, "God is unthinkable, and unknowable." If you imagine that these words will strike fear into his heart, you are in for a surprise. He probably has had no education to speak of, and has done little reading, but he will answer, "You're right about God being unthinkable. No man by searching can find out God. But He is knowable. In fact, He is everywhere, and it's easy to know Him. You just open your heart and He comes in." Here, then, is an instance where the Infinite is not a thought that causes dizziness. It is an affair of the heart. Instead of being appalling, it is joyous and uplifting. I am reminded of a passage in Renan's *Poetry of the Celtic Races*. "Tell the simple to pass their lives in aspiration after truth, and beauty, and moral goodness, and your words will be meaningless to them. Tell them to love God and they will understand you perfectly."

So your friend's problem as to what he should do with the Infinite is solved by accepting it, naturally and instinctively. If he attempts to comprehend it, he will fail: then, like many others, he will make it synonymous with the word *indefinite*, or treat it as having no practical meaning.

## IV

We can know realities without comprehending them. For instance, you are a person, a self, but neither you nor anybody else can say what a personality, or a self, is essentially. Read a whole library of books on the ego—its nature, its origin, its limitations, its disorders, and its destiny—and, although a wiser man when you slowly close the last volume, you do not comprehend the ego. You know it descriptively, not definitely. Emerson came near to the finest delineation. "An individual is an encloser. Time and space, liberty and necessity, truth and thought are left at large no longer."

The self is invisible and seems to take on the attributes of the Infinite. When an astronomer is looking at Neptune through the telescope, and thinking as he looks, you may say his ego is in his body, and that both are in the observatory. But isn't his ego also in Neptune, millions of miles away? . . . If God is inscrutable, so is the personal "I." Try to analyse this "I." . . . You cannot. The "I" is unable to look at itself; observed and observer. That effort would bring about a confused mental condition akin to dizziness.

Thus we arrive at a curious analogy, namely, that any effort to comprehend the personality of God, and our own personality, involves the same result—failure. Evidently selves are to be accepted, not analysed. . . . We meet other selves in business and we like or dislike them. We meet them in society and find them dull or interesting. We meet them in gatherings of all kinds and accept them for what they are, as manifested in bodily presence, speech, and action, but we never dream of denying their existence. The human ego is a mystery, but it is a fact. A bit of smart repartee is not a depressing experience due to our ignorance of the nature of the self which conceived it so suddenly. We enjoy it without a thought of its obscure origin. The Finite and the Infinite are blended in every man and woman, and we never boggle over it. Why, then, should the personality of the Infinite confuse us when we cannot fathom our own?

The idea of eternity is one of those which possess dizzying qualities. I have heard a man trying to explain it, as time without end, in this fashion: "Imagine all the grains of sand in the Sahara, then in all the desert portions in the planet, then in all the Universe. Imagine, further, that each grain of sand represents a trillion years. The total would not equal eternity." At this point, the thought having been carefully followed, there comes the feeling of such an immensity of years that the mind reels under the effort to grasp the whole. Any man can tease himself—and others—by inventing new pictorial and dramatic methods of imaging time without end, but is that what eternity means? The dictionary defines eternal as "having neither beginning nor end of existence," hence eternity would appear to be not a time sphere at all. The primary fact in eternal life is not its *duration* but its *spirituality*. And to this the mind of the average man, as well as the mind of the leader of thought, always reverts. Time without end is incomprehensible: but a spiritual life with unchangeable foundations is an idea more readily assimilated.

## VI

Time and space have always provided us with the deepest metaphysical discussions. You will either take to them or you will avoid them. And some men of note have not been slow to express their aversion for all abstract philosophy. Matthew Arnold referred derisively to those who had "too much talent for abstract reasoning," and Frederic Harrison, in his *Philosophy of Common Sense*, speaks of metaphysics as "the fruitless search after insoluble puzzles." If you agree with these views you will escape the dizziness of the profundities they hold so cheaply. If you disagree, you will chance a few headaches and go forward cheerfully.

Perhaps St. Augustine's ideas of time will appeal to you as a good beginning. In his *Confessions* he says, "Those two times, past and future, how can they be, when the past is not now, and the future is not yet?"

From this it follows that if there is any duration at all it is in the present. How long does the present last? It "speeds so hurriedly from the future to the past that it does not endure even for a little space. If it has duration, it is divided into a past and a future: but the present has no duration." Then is there no time at all? . . . Dizziness! . . . St. Augustine's answer is too long to quote here. Read it for yourself in Book XI of the *Confessions*. Once more we are the victims of *words*.

## VII

All time is *one*. Past, present, and future are a unity. Duration comprises the three. Last week you were in New York. At the moment you are in Baltimore. Next week you will be on the way to London. The panorama of life never stops as you proceed from city to city, but you have your visit to New York, with all its evidences, just as surely as you have the results of your visit to Baltimore, where your business is not yet concluded. As youth is "lost" in manhood, so is the past "lost" in the present; and the future is in the now which we have not yet experienced. Analyse closely a metaphysical puzzle and you will see from the artfulness of its construction that the point of your argument has been taken away before you have had time to use it. Achilles and the tortoise is a parable of much of our philosophy.

Psychologically, this sense of mental defeat is due to a failure of imagination, and to the subsequent sense of distress that the most spectacular power we possess has been unable to picture an idea. But as I pointed out in a previous letter, this failure does not justify us in coming to an adverse conclusion respecting the idea itself. If we cannot imagine endless duration, we cannot conclude that there is no such thing. If we cannot imagine the *mode* of human consciousness, we are not justified in affirming that consciousness does not exist.

## VIII

There are not wanting those who complain that philosophers themselves are guilty of conceiving thoughts

that confuse; and that their pages are occasionally dizzying in their profundity. Hence, also, the alleged remark of Hegel: "Only one man has understood me, and he has misunderstood me!" In one of your letters you complained that Kant was annoying on account of what appeared to be his wilful complexity. Nobody would say that he is as clear as Schopenhauer, but some at least of Kant's obscurity arises from his method: a method that seems to prove the truth of every proposition, thus causing a sense of confusion that is both baffling and irritating unless his purpose is divined at the outset.

Paul Ree, who was a friend of Nietzsche, had felt this feeling of contradiction, but he accepted it jauntily. "In Kant's works," he wrote, "you feel as though you were in a country fair. You can buy from him anything you want—freedom of the will and captivity of the will, idealism and a refutation of idealism, atheism and the good Lord. Like a juggler out of an empty hat, Kant draws out of the concept of duty a God, immortality, and freedom—to the great surprise of his readers."

## IX

By way of illustration take the famous *antinomies*. Consult Max Muller's translation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (p. 344). You find thesis and antithesis set out as follows:

*Thesis*: The world has a beginning in time and is limited also with regard to space.

*Antithesis*: The world has no beginning and no limits in space, but is infinite in respect both to time and space.

You study the arguments for the thesis, and they sound as convincing as the others. Yet both cannot be true. . . . Confusion of mind follows. . . . What are you going to do? Your mental condition is something like that described by Fullerton, who says that "it seems to be proved that the world must be endless in space, without a beginning or end in time, and just as plausibly proved that it cannot be either. It seems to be proved

that finite spaces and times are infinitely divisible, and at the same time they cannot be infinitely divisible." No wonder a girl student said, "If this is philosophy it's a horrid jumble."

Patience is a virtue, especially in philosophy; and when you come to a full stop—beaten for the moment—accept the defeat and turn to something else. Later, return to the dizzied pages, fresh and keen, and Kant's antinomies will be obscurities no longer. You will not only "get" them, but you will apply their method to other mental facts. What is *in* the mind by reason of its very constitution will become a reasoning force. Thus, to doubt everything is impossible, for you cannot doubt that you doubt.

Cordially yours,

P.S.—I nearly forgot the list of words. They are: time, space, unthinkable, indefinite, inscrutable, eternity, duration, spirituality, metaphysical, abstract reasoning, insoluble, imagination, mode, complexity, immortality, antinomies. Give each one its meed of attention. It will repay you.

### Questions and Problems

1. Can you imagine a house with an inside but no outside? or an outside and no inside? If not, why not? Is the idea of space a necessary idea? or can we think without it?
2. Berkeley declared that "to say things exist when no mind perceives them is perfectly unintelligible." Discuss this statement (*a*) as it stands, (*b*) then from the standpoint of modern science as seen in the history of the discovery of Neptune, and in the story of the molecule.
3. Heraclitus used to say, "Nobody can enter the same river twice." A critic answered him by saying, "I have bathed in the same river fifty times." Was this answer effective? If not, why?



4. What is wrong with the old problem which asks, "What would happen if an invisible force came into collision with an immovable object?"
5. "It is impossible to imagine a new colour. Shades? Yes, but not a new colour." Do you agree or disagree? Give reasons.
6. Sir William Hamilton says that "we cannot conceive space as infinite, or without limits. You may launch out in thought beyond the solar walk, you may transcend in fancy even the universe of matter and rise from sphere to sphere in the region of empty space, until imagination sinks exhausted: with all this what have you done? You have never gone beyond the finite, you have attained at best only to the indefinite, and the indefinite, however expanded, is still always finite. As Pascal said, 'the infinite is infinitely incomprehensible.'" How then do we know the infinite well enough to talk about it? The finite is limited. Cannot we imagine the illimitable? If not, why not?
7. "A quantity, say a foot, has an infinity of parts. Any part of this quantity, say an inch, has also an infinity. But one infinity is not larger than another. Therefore an inch is equal to a foot." (From Hamilton's *Metaphysics*, p. 522.) Examine the words here as to their meanings. Then analyse the reasoning.
8. "In philosophy," says M. Thibaudet, "everything is refutable and nothing is refutable." What lies behind this paradox? Is it that the refuted truth of to-day is believed to-morrow? that when soul is banished in one age it returns in the next?
9. "The question whether we are also acquainted with our bare selves, as opposed to particular thoughts and feelings, is a very difficult one, upon which it would be rash to speak positively. When we try to look into ourselves we always seem to come upon some particular thought or feeling and not upon the 'I.'" (Bertrand Russell, in *Problems of Philosophy*.) Have you ever caught your self, your ego, when quite alone and completely detached from sense, memory, or experience? Manifestly no. When you seek the "I," it is the "I" seeking the "I." Isn't that why the "I" is never discovered alone

but is always in company? Describe your own efforts at interpreting the ego.

10. The fly-wheel of a certain engine revolves at the rate of one thousand revolutions per minute. Between one revolution and another there is said to be an interval of time—fractional, but real. If the rate were increased to two thousand a second, would there be time intervals as before? Or do you think the whole thing is a paper calculation only? Is time infinitely divisible? Discuss this point.

## LETTER V

### Right and Wrong

#### I

DEAR ROGER,

You have told me that you believed in God. To you, therefore, God is in charge of the world—omnipotent and omniscient. Logically, that rules out the possibility of evil control. It postulates the supremacy of good. Pope said in his *Essay on Man*

Whatever is, is right.

To some people the saying is hard, impossible, and unbelievable. But these same people will readily accept Browning's

God's in His Heaven,  
All's right with the world.

If all is right with the world, despite its pain, suffering, injustice, and crime, there must be a higher good which eclipses our mean measurements and estimates of evil. You get a glimpse of the truth in the French saying, "To understand all is to forgive all." So in asking you to think for yourself in these matters, I am going to direct your attention to the larger issues first.

#### II

There is only one great Plan in the Universe. Being one, all its facts and forces act and interact: physical, mental, spiritual, social, political, commercial. Out of the combined play of these activities we get a stream of events, some of which we classify as right and some as wrong. Not that we are in perfect agreement, for some of the things I call right you may call wrong, and your wrong may be my right. . . . Were the early Moham-medan wars ethical in any sense? Was the motive for

the suppression of the slave trade a moral motive, or purely economic? How shall we judge Gladstone and his view of the Bulgarian atrocities? What of Hitler and the Jews in Germany? Is a strong tariff for ourselves and no tariff at all for other nations a right conception? Is there more evil than good in the dole? . . .

I ask these questions to remind you that the subject of this letter is one of vast implications. The whole of the world's life is shot through with it, and, however clear your own notions of good or evil may be, their application to practical affairs is sometimes fraught with debate and uncertainty.

You open your newspaper and become aware of the happenings of the last twenty-four hours. Suspicion among European nations; kidnapping crimes in America; hold-ups everywhere; trade disputes; financial scandals—a story of grave evils and not a few injustices. Admittedly, the good side is also presented: generous gifts for public welfare; new discoveries in television; the discharge of a big personal debt after twenty-five years' effort; the happy celebration of a golden wedding—these and many other fine things are recorded by way of balance. But the deep does not call to the deep unless some catastrophe, like an earthquake, suggests the great mystery of justice. Why should innocent children die a horrible death? Why should a prosperous city be buried in the flowing lava? If this be the will of God, what are we to think of it? Is an earthquake an event that is physically right and morally wrong? No. The programme of inanimate Nature always takes the first place. Animate Nature—living things—came later. Community and city life came later still. Hence, if man builds a city where Nature has not yet settled down, he takes the risk. He cannot expect volcanic forces to go away when he begins to lay out a subdivision over the very place where, in the depths, they are preparing for another upheaval. They do not respond to a policeman's "Move on." They claim priority of rights. And they stay.

### III

Man takes the same risks when he ventures on the sea or in the air. He cannot expect Nature's forces to

turn aside, or suspend activity, until he is out of danger. . . . You see, then, how natural forces and human destiny are inextricably connected together, but we no longer call Nature cruel except as a poetic fancy. Strictly speaking, justice and injustice, as ethical terms, belong to human relationships. Nature is unmoral, and therefore immoral accusations are beside the mark. There is no moral merit in the sun when its shining promotes the growth of your kitchen garden; and there is no demerit in its rays when they absolutely spoil your lawn. There is no kindly sympathy in the mountain upheaval which lays bare a million tons of rich gold ore to give wealth to a hundred cities; and there is no vengeance in the earthquake which engulfs a population, or anger in the hurricane which destroys the property of a whole community, leaving them defenceless and destitute.

## IV

Do you think of justice in the world as if it were an occasional case in court? Think of it rather as *a continuous process* throughout Nature, and in the life of both mind and soul. Justice for man made a beginning of sorts when he began a community. I do not refer only to the adjudication of rights and wrongs, and to punishment for offences. I am referring to the larger conception previously outlined: man as a creature surrounded by forces which sometimes work for his welfare and sometimes against it. Thus, your own justice is not a something that you will get in the future: you got it at birth, and you have been getting it ever since.

You may claim that thousands of men do not get justice at birth: that the handicap of a diseased body or a warped mind is a definite evil, and is thus an injustice to the innocent recipient. That it is a real handicap we may admit, but that it is an injustice we must deny. Justice is truth in action; hence the laws of heredity, although they inflict hardship, are not unethical. . . . Like produces like. From health comes health: from disease comes disease. That is the law. And the more surely it acts the more certain is its justice. But, you will argue, is nothing to be said of the infliction of a penalty on a son for the sin of the father? It is, you

say, no trifle to suffer for years because of a sin committed a long time ago by another individual. I agree, but before going into that may I draw your attention to a more impressive fact, namely, the way in which the affairs of all the world interact, and carry forward their effects, not for a season, but for all time. The deeds of the dead rulers of Europe are not dead: they are still living in the political and moral consequences of the moment—which means that the justice and injustice of to-day were begun by Czars, Emperors, and Potentates whose bodies are in the dust.

All history is one piece. It is a serial story, always "to be continued in our next," and the events of a hundred years ahead are in process of formation now. Some of those events will be highly fortunate, because at the moment, and in the near future, men are working, and will be working, not for self, but for the good of the world. Some of the events will be unhappy, because a group of men are conspiring to serve their own immediate interests with no thought for future benefits. Thus, the evolution of humanity is a slow movement from evil to good and from wrong to right. Justice is progressive. It could not be otherwise when the fact of solidarity is taken into account. Solidarity is defined as "coherence and oneness in Nature, relations, or interests, or of a race, community, or class." Actions are never individual. We cannot isolate our deeds and apportion their consequences as we will. The hard work of pioneers a hundred years ago is bearing fruit to-day. The good they did, and the mistakes they made are real potencies. We are all makers of history. Your child, on whom you have lavished care and attention, is your contribution to the possibilities of a better world.

Think for yourself. Can you explain the evils of the present without reference to the past? Europe, heir to a thousand intrigues, and the scene of numerous wars, is still in the grip of its history. Justice and injustice struggle for mastery. America, alarmed at its intellectual poverties, is but reaping the reward of over-emphasis on the value of material ownerships and posses-

sions. . . . Your own son, when he comes to estimate the conditions of the world fifty years hence, will look back on the present period for active causes. The hurricane which will devastate a whole country is in slow preparation even now. The crime which will carry its consequences through two generations is being conceived and planned to-day; the resolve to accomplish a great good which will realize itself twenty years hence is at the moment only a vital purpose. . . . So, whenever you attempt to detect the presence or absence of justice, or the relative amounts of good and evil, remember the word solidarity.

Those people who find themselves afflicted by facts or influences from a past, near or remote, will inevitably discover that some compensatory gift has been offered at the same time. A loss in one direction opens out a way for gain in another. A consciousness of inability creates desire and effort; and a new group of virtues comes into being. The law of compensation is the law of justice. It is Nature's effort to atone for seeming harshness to the new forms of life which she always loves.

## VI

When you leave the larger questions of right and wrong for those which are more individual, you feel that your feet are firmly planted on the ground. You are more confident of your judgment. The event to be examined is more easily analysed. For instance, here is a man who is being tried for embezzlement. He forged another man's signature and stole a considerable sum of money. You look into all the facts and conclude that an event may be physically right and morally wrong. The prisoner's fountain-pen was made to write signatures, among other things; and his fingers were made to hold a pen; in fact, he did not sin against physical law: he fulfilled it. His offence was to employ physical power unjustly. He put them to a wrong use for the sake of self.

Again, the laws of Nature will work just as readily for a crook as for an honest man. Sometimes the honest man feels like registering protest against this facility given to evil-minded persons. But a motor-car engine

is quite impartial; it will act for a thief as quickly or as slowly as for the rightful owner. It might be a wise thing, and an economic arrangement, if all the bank's money could be stored in a simple cupboard, the lock of which, being very moral, refused to open to anybody but the cashier or his deputy. But that is not how the laws of Nature operate. A saint who tries to walk over the Thames will sink as rapidly as a bootlegger.

## VII

Then is wrongdoing essentially an invasion of the rights of others? Draw up a list of major and minor offences, and I think you will find in this idea of invasion a good working hypothesis; for if the invasion be not against the individual, it is against the rights of the community. These rights are elementary and for the most part undisputed. What we call sin is *amartia*, that is, a falling short. It misses the mark and entails a series of sufferings in consequence. But you could not describe it as an entity in itself. And it is difficult to regard it as something unforeseen. God has no competitor. Good is not in danger of defeat by Evil. The Eternal Energy is one Energy, not two. Zoroastrianism is dead.

Righteousness—the quality of being right—can be represented by several figures of speech, but, essentially, it is ability to meet the demands of an accepted standard. If your yard measure is equal to the one which is the classic for all yards, and which reposes in a certain Government office, it is a righteous yard. And if your life does not fall short when placed side by side with the Ideal, it is a righteous life. Sin is inequality: failure to meet the demand. Again, right conduct is keeping in line with the spiritual: wrong is marching out of step. Right is harmony, wrong is discord.

## VIII

The origin of the difference between right and wrong has been a much debated issue for centuries. On the one hand, there are those who claim that the distinction existed before man came into being, and that it is a law of the spiritual world although its operations extend into



the material world. On the other hand, there are those who claim that ethics is a purely natural science, the offspring of experience in the form of utility. An examination of the history of moral ideas certainly shows progressive stages of enlightenment and practice. There were ages of ignorance, said an apostle, that were divinely winked at, or overlooked. Moreover, actions that are good are obviously helpful socially, just as actions that are bad are injurious. Hence, the theory of the utilitarian school has a plausibility about it which would seem to demand immediate assent. But the matter is not so obvious as it looks.

Let us imagine a city of modest size wherein a prohibited industry is carried on secretly, and in a highly organized manner. For two years all goes well, that is to say, the authorities and the criminals conspire to defeat the law. A visitor, knowing nothing of the facts, would call it a well-governed city, for there is nothing particularly wrong with its surface morals. . . . But gangs arise, and the conspirators disagree about the spoils. The disputes are as yet private, but they are sinister. . . . Threats are made. . . . One night three hired thugs lie in wait to shoot on sight. Others are equipped for theft. Soon the storm will burst. . . . Now at this moment the surface morals of the city are no worse than before, but deeper down they are ten times worse. Murder is in many hearts. . . . Hence it is clear that the outward conduct of a community is not a criterion of its essential morality. The courts are not trying cases of homicide, and yet these cases exist in embryo.

## IX

And this brings me to the point: that right and wrong, finally, are conditions of the soul. It has always been so. It always will be so. In *actions* a man may have an impeccable record. He may be able to face the highest code of ethics and say, "All these laws have I observed from my youth upward"; yet he may be disturbed not only by unruly desire, but by deliberate intentions which he is too cautious to put into execution. This was the criticism which Christ directed against the circumspect Pharisee, and indeed against all external conduct that was merely correct. The Kingdom of God

is within. It works from within, outwards; not from the outward to the within. Thus, there may be an external consistency and an internal protest: a visible rectitude and an invisible rebellion. Morality is not finally a social utility. What utilitarianism can enter into the sphere of soul and assess its delicate motions of desire, conflict, defeat, victory? Bertrand Russell, who will not be accused of credulity by anybody anywhere, says in a recent article that "science alone cannot prove that we ought to consider the welfare of others. Thus many ethics are compatible with science, and none can be proved true by scientific arguments alone."

The old and sometimes despised trinity of the True, the Beautiful, and the Good, is returning for a new evaluation. Their association is not a thing of chance. Truth and Beauty, according to the poet, are an organic unity.

Truth still has Beauty  
Take refuge there.

Beauty and virtue, using the latter word in its original sense of meritorious power, are also vital in their connection. No wonder we are still discussing the eternal nature of right and wrong. Are we not still debating the first principles of Beauty? If Beauty is eluding us, virtue, in the form of the Good, is also elusive if we look for it in the natural world. Right conduct is not the rationale of moral history. It is a perception of the essential beauty of character. It is not a utility. It is a fine art. There is no ethical *avoids* by which actions are put on the scales and their worth duly recorded. In the civilization of to-day, as in others of the past, some unworthy actions, if not discovered, are thus far innocuous. They have done no visible damage, that is, when judged by earthly standards. In the spiritual world, however, there is no escape. Secret, or open, our disobedience to law meets with retribution. We reap what we sow in Nature. We reap what we sow in Spirit.

The freedom of the will is not a matter of grave concern. An armistice has been signed by the contestants on both sides. An ardent materialist, like the

late Remy de Gourmont, commented favourably on Camille Sabatier's *Duplicisme Humain*, wherein it is written, "Liberty is as inexplicable as it is certain," although de Gourmont added certain reservations, and went on to say, "If men are free and consequently responsible, there need be no change in our judicial institutions. If men are not free, if they are irresponsible, there need still be no change, for a crime is a crime just the same—always an anti-social act against the repetition of which it is necessary to protect ourselves." It may not be given to us to reconcile responsibility with necessity, but, on the other hand, we ourselves have to reconcile freedom with law. Hence the phrase, "free within limits," is a truce which for the time being appears to satisfy both parties. Perhaps this is how many other of our outstanding differences will be solved, at any rate for the time being.

## XI

The chief words used in this letter are: good, right, wrong, omnipotence, omniscience, pain, justice, injustice, evil, events, implications, community, immoral, unmoral, moral, sympathy, vengeance, process, solidarity, heredity, history, hypothesis, *amartia*, righteousness, inequality, classic, utility, enlightenment, beauty, rationale, liberty, freedom, irresponsibility, reservations, necessity.

A list of words is not appetizing at first glance; and you may think I am a faddist on the subject. No, no. Get your words right and you reduce your chances of error. In the list above there is concealed a whole world of thought. Take *sympathy*. Adam Smith has pages of philosophy on that one word; and to follow it through its ramifications is to enter the fields of both creation and criticism in their widest signification. *Hypothesis* will take you into the very centre of the principles of science. *Enlightenment* is a whole period in philosophy. *Classic*? Well, if you have not read St. Beuve on *What is a Classic?* you have a treat in store. *Reservations*? Mental reservations in conduct carry you into practical ethics: and casuistry opens a chapter in the history of conceptions of right and wrong. So try to find out the *associations* of words, as well as their distinct meanings.

## XII

By way of exercise get out your note-book, and, from memory, write down the ideas of this letter. Then read the letter again, supplementing your notes, or reconstituting them. The main point is this: that if your creed includes a Supreme Unity as Creator, and if you really believe in this Good, you have a foundation on which to build. A man who can say, with his whole nature, "God is," can be assured that he is on the way to understanding.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

1. Brandes, in his *Creative Spirits*, quotes Renan as follows: "Logic cannot grasp delicate shades of meaning—yet truths that are of a moral nature depend solely and entirely upon these shades. It is therefore of no avail to pounce on a truth with the clumsy violence of a wild boar, for fleet and nimble truth will escape the ruthless attack, and all the pains to capture it will be in vain." Is the reference here to the practical truths of conduct, i.e. to casuistry, or is it truth in its broader aspects? Is Renan arguing for moral *perception* as against reasoned justice? How can he expect uninstructed minds to arrive at the truth if it depends upon such delicate processes of approach?
2. Adjust the two following statements:
  - (a) Live as if each moment would be your last.
  - (b) Act as if you were going to live for ever, for that is the secret of success.
3. "One strong thing I find here below: the just thing, the true thing. My friend, if thou hadst all the artillery of Woolwich trundling at thy back in support of a

unjust thing . . . I would advise thee to call a halt. . . . If the thing is unjust, thou hast not succeeded, no, not though bonfires blazed from north to south, and editors wrote leading articles, and the just things lay trampled out of sight." (Thomas Carlyle in *Past and Present*.) Here is a supreme confidence in the final might of right. Is force, then, a wrong thing in itself? If so, why? If not, are revolutions necessarily a crime?

4. "It is hardly too much to say that all the important errors of conduct, all the burdens of men or of societies, are caused by the inadequacies in the association of the primal animal emotions with those mental powers which have so rapidly developed in mankind." (Shailer Matthews, in *The Neighbour*.) Draw up a list of the important errors of conduct. Trace them to their origin in the relationship of body to mind.
5. Nietzsche wrote, "What is more harmful than any vice? Pity for the ineffective and weak. . . . Christianity." How would you criticize this statement?
6. "The refusal to help another in great need, the quiet contemplation of the death of another from starvation while we have more than enough, is certainly cruel and fiendish, but it is not a wrong." Analyse this view of Schopenhauer, and compass it with his definition of wrong as "that quality of the conduct of an individual in which he extends the assertion of the will appearing in his own body so far that it becomes the denial of the will appearing in the bodies of others." Is not the denial of the will in others for food a wrong?
7. David Hume, the philosopher, wrote to a friend in 1768 these words: "O! how I long to see America and the East Indies revolted, totally and finally—the revenue reduced to half—public credit fully discredited by bankruptcy—the third of London in ruins, and the rascally mob subdued." How would you proceed in order to discover the origin of this violent attitude on the part of a philosopher? Having found it, would you justify it? or excuse it?
8. Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, lays down this moral rule: "So act that the maxim of your conduct could become a universal law." Is this the

Golden Rule in Kantian form? How far back in history is this sentiment traceable?

9. "What is gambling, then, but the art of bringing about in a second those changes that destiny ordinarily produces only in many hours, or even in many years, the art of gathering together in a single instant the scattered emotions of the slow-moving existence of other men, the secret of living an entire life in a few minutes. . . ? Gambling is a hand-to-hand fight with destiny." (Anatole France.) Admitting that to some minds there is a strong attraction in games of chance, on what grounds would you condemn gambling?
10. Mrs. Trest and Mrs. Dillay—disguised names—are in court. The Trest tom-cat has killed the Dillay canary, and Mrs. Dillay is seeking damages. She acts as her own Counsel, and avers that (a) a cat has no right to kill a canary; (b) the cat has been abetted and encouraged by the Trest family in its wicked intention; and, therefore (c) the Trest family are finally responsible. What rights has a cat? Can it be wicked? Can a family use an animal in such a way that they and the animal are linked together in guilt? Are cats susceptible to urge—like dogs? Has not any animal a right to follow its natural instincts? Get up a case to refute Mrs. Dillay.
11. How would you answer this from Machiavelli? "When the entire safety of a country is at stake, no consideration of what is just or unjust, merciful or cruel, praiseworthy or shameful, must intervene." Compare its ethics with "My country . . . right or wrong."
12. "Nature . . . arms and equips an animal to find its place and living in the earth, and at the same time she arms and equips another animal to destroy it." (Emerson's *Nature*.) Is this moral, immoral, or unmoral? Is the spider cruel to kill and eat a fly, and man humane to kill and eat a cow?
13. "Honestly, I cannot understand what people mean when they talk about the freedom of the human will." (Einstein, in Max Planck's *Where is Science Going?*) In this case, how can anti-semitism be condemned as really wrong?

## LETTER VI

### Values: This is Better Than That

DEAR ROGER,

Are you beginning to feel weary about my insistence on word study as a preliminary to clear thinking? And is there a demand on your sense of indulgence—which you willingly accord me? I thank you. . . . But here is a word you cannot afford to miss: *value*. You meet it everywhere. It is in the vocabulary of the philosopher and in that of the moralist. It is seen on the “throwaway” advertising a sale of cheap shoes or hats, and it is also seen in the statistical summaries of the economist. It enters into every comparison you make. It is the soul of every measurement. It is the canon of every distance. It is the criterion of every judgment of worth. There are physical and mental values, values moral and spiritual, commercial and financial. But what is value? For a partial answer you will have to turn to the volume on *Value* by Professor Urban, to Sellars’ remarks in his *Principles and Problems of Philosophy*, and to other authorities.

The word itself is defined as “the desirability or worth of a thing as compared with something else.” Whatever value is, in itself—and we shall inquire into that later—we seem to get it by an act of comparison. Of two biceps muscles belonging to two navvies, *this* is better than *that* because it is bigger and stronger. Of two memories for a medical examination, the one which has its facts organized has more value than the one that has not. But is there no value except the one that is generated in this way? Let us see. *Truth is better than Error*. All the people I know or have heard about appear to be absolutely convinced of this fact, whether they are

believers, half-believers, agnostics, or nogodists. Remember that. It is one of our most massive and uniform certainties. It binds all men together whatever they believe or do. . . .

## II

Of course, men are disagreed as to what truth actually is: in fact they are leagues apart; but, no matter—we are agreed on the principle itself. That very agreement is worthy of attention, but a primary question calls for notice: is this superiority of truth a product of experience, or does it belong to a world that is independent of our experience? Is this small planet the only place in the vast universe where the supreme excellence of truth is known? It requires some hardihood to answer Yes, and the answer itself raises a smile of incredulity. . . .

I will state the issue again: would truth be better than error even though man did not exist? . . . Don't answer hurriedly. . . . If you say No, then error conceivably might be better than truth. If you answer Yes, then the betterness of truth is independent of human experience: it belongs to the eternal, not the temporal. Ultimate value, in itself, is like the nature of being: it *is*. All our subsidiary values take their cue from this supreme value.

## III

When Lewis Carroll wrote the manuscript of *Alice in Wonderland*, he little thought that one day in the far future his meticulous penmanship would be worth \$75,000.00. Is it a scarcity value? or that of an original when there can be only one? How far is the worth of the manuscript due to the interest and popularity of the book? Commercially, the fact of worth is easily traceable. There has been only one Lewis Carroll, only one *Alice*, and only one original manuscript. But if the book had been a failure, there would have been no interest in this original, and no price at all would have been offered for it. Its success, therefore, is its first asset, and its inherent worth as an appeal to sentiment and



imagination is its second asset. Its value is an echo of ultimate value.

Yet all worldly values are relative. The whole of Manhattan Island was purchased from the Indians for about \$25.00. It is now worth \$1,000,000.00 an acre. Years ago the manuscript of Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* sold for £2. Interest in original manuscripts has increased, and if somebody discovered the original of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, what would the bidding be at the finish?

#### IV

I fear I shall never be able to find room for all I had intended to say in this letter, so I have decided to give you an indication of the outline, and you can then work it out for yourself. Divide your study of values into the usual classification: physical, mental, moral, spiritual, subdividing them in order to include excellences of art, literature, history and so forth. Then, when you are ready with a formal list, write your critical notes on each statement. For instance the *Scientific Method is better than Unorganized Thought*. You would have a good deal to say about that. On the surface it is absolutely correct, but if you read the life of Descartes, who made a strong plea for the thought-value of laziness, you do not feel quite so sure that unorganized thinking is a contemptible proceeding. Inspiration has little method about it, hence the method of science is not the sole way to truth.

In the moral sphere you will meet with the obvious. That *marriage is better than free love* is agreed to by all responsible thinkers, as well as the mass of civilized men and women; and marriage, despite its tragedies and comedies, has thus a social value which is not likely to diminish. What the world needs is a science and art of marriage. As yet we have little or nothing that approaches the ideal. . . .

When you discuss *Virtue is better than Vice*, you will find the benefit of attention to words, for the immoralists give to these terms a meaning that is very different from the usual acceptance. The scientists' description of vice is "Nature's method of getting rid of the unfit." The

finest conception of virtue is that of Christ when the woman touched the hem of His garment: "virtue is gone out of Me." Virtue is *power*. . . . When you come to *Diplomacy is better than Aggression*, you approach the finer applications of ethics. There is such a thing as moral scholarship, and tact is one of its proficiencies.

Commercial values are a world in themselves. One of the elementaries is *Order is better than Disorder*, and out of it has come the efficiencies of Scientific Management. You meet with the value of man's production: and you also meet with a change of values after the saturation point has been reached: indeed, the rise and fall of commercial figures is an absorbing story everywhere. . . . But it is only when you survey the whole field of human life and activity that you get the comprehensive view. That view seems to say that value is the most fundamental of all facts: material and spiritual. What is all the world a-seeking? *Value*. The Best. The Highest. The Finest. Always the superlative. . . . Unfortunately, there are many fake values, and all is not gold that glitters. He who can separate the seeming from the real, or who knows where authority and judgment can be found, is armed against the consequences of error.

You see how comprehensive a subject it is, and you may expect considerable pleasure and illumination from your further investigations. My reserve of space here is for a few remarks on the superiority of the spiritual to the material.

In a previous letter I asked the question: what facts are most important? I endeavoured to answer it from an educational point of view. Now I vary the question and say, "What facts have most value to you?" Exactly how you will answer it I do not know, but it will interest me greatly when I do know, for the subject promises a strange attraction. . . . Every man has in him a magnet, and he draws to himself the ideas and the facts for which he has a native preference. Does a writer attach more importance to the discovery of Neptune than to the story of the death of Socrates? Is he

more impressed by the history of wireless than by the story of the War of Independence? Does the crucifixion of Christ mean nothing, and researches into Mendelism everything? Are the soaring prices in stocks and shares of more interest than Shelley's soaring lark? Everything must have its place, doubtless, but, speaking comparatively, what place do we give the material issues in relation to the spiritual?

Such is the pressure of material facts upon one's attention that spiritual facts are often crowded out. . . . By and by a protest is made, and for a while the things of the Spirit prevail. They lead. Then something happens to bring about a return of materialism, and the spiritual element is temporarily obscured. There is a rhythm, an ebb and a flow. . . . Finally, one side gains the ascendancy. Frequently, it is the material side. All values are then material values, for spiritual things are only "extras" developed in the course of physical and mental evolution. Death extinguishes both body and soul. This inversion of appearance and reality must strike you as passing strange.

## VI

At one period of my life I had to pass daily the Crematorium at Golders Green, London, and the sight of its smoking chimney sometimes set me thinking, especially on the subject of finality. One morning I stood at attention while the funeral cortege of a well-known woman writer filed in through the open gates. She was the wife of a leader of thought known throughout the world. As I stood there, the contrast between soul values and body values came to mind very forcibly.

According to the material view, the soul becomes extinct in a moment: it passes into nothingness. But the body requires time for disintegration. It may endure for thousands of years like an Egyptian Pharaoh, or it may be quickly consumed in the fire. . . . Here, then, was a woman of exceptional intelligence, and with a rare gift of affection, whose body had lasted longer than her soul! It seemed incredible. . . . Soon that body would be reduced to ashes, and those ashes would be scattered in the rose garden: symbol of the dissolution and dis-

tribution of all the powers that go to make up a personality. And yet . . . ?

I was oppressed by the feeling of contradiction. It was as if the materialist attached more value to the plush-lined jewel box than to the diamond tiara itself.

If Nature alone produces the human soul, she manifests an unexpected cynicism in extinguishing its light instantaneously, the while she proceeds with utmost leisureliness to turn the body into its native dust. Nature, so keen on values, gives the lie to her own methods if the material estimate be true; for she fails to give a moment's duration to the separated soul, which is manifestly the finest product of creation, yet conscientiously restores the chemicals of the body to the earth for further use. Matter has thus an immortality of sorts. Spirit has none.

On which side do you take your stand? I do not mean your stand as a dogmatist, and a gnostic, intimately acquainted with the details of another world, but your stand as a man of insight and reason? Doubtless you are "on the side of the angels." To you the presumption is all in favour of survival, even on grounds that are purely intellectual. On other grounds you take a stronger stand.

Some of your friends and acquaintances will be lined up against you in this matter of the continued existence of the soul. A few of these may be particularly scornful. One may be almost violent. He is the man to watch. His vehemence suggests that he is afraid he is in the wrong. He may be a Saul who will become a Paul.

## VII

There is an intellectual attitude which stands for the negation of all values: *nihilism*. To the nihilist nothing matters, essentially and ultimately. If the world makes definite progress towards a desirable goal, it is of no consequence. If it fails, and civilizations die, no matter. The planet and all it contains, its recorded history, its literature, its works of art, its buildings and monuments, everything of beauty and worth will either go up in smoke or perish in a temperature the cold of which no instrument can register. Why trouble about

anything when utter and complete annihilation awaits us and our earthly habitation? Why strive to accomplish an eternal result when there is no eternity in which it may find a place?

The materialist has a good deal of trouble with nihilism in its various manifestations. How can he consistently blame the barbarities of a predatory monarch or the economic cruelties of a system which exploits human lives for the gain of a few? He may claim that the values exist, although of a temporary nature; and that as happiness and misery are realities of experiences, we should aim at the one and avoid the other. Doubtless. But if complete extinction of all life and consciousness is the final destiny of the world, what difference does it make, asks the nihilist, whether the history of the planet is fortunate or unfortunate? The materialist, now on his dignity, will answer that the difference is one of experience, and that pleasure is to be preferred before pain. A million years of happiness is a greater good than a million years of agony. The nihilist thinks this is a commonplace remark. What he means is that in the sum total of things a planet that is a failure is no different from one that is a success, for both perish ignominiously in the final cataclysm. Unless the achievements of the successful planet are given some kind of permanence, they are, in the long run, of no greater importance than the inadequacies of the planet that was a failure. And, since the materialist regards the Universe as meaningless, the logic would seem to be on the side of the nihilist. Only eternal values can give meaning to temporal facts.

If you will analyse the life of to-day, you will find sufficient evidences of intellectual and moral nihilism. Old distinctions have disappeared. Right and wrong in some directions have ceased to exist. Nothing matters. True, there are personal preferences, but these are the immediacies of sensation: for example, a fat wallet is better than empty pockets, and half a pudding is better than none. At a time when service has become the watchword of a generation, there are strenuous forces which seek to enthrone the self. Expression, not repression, is the slogan.

Values of some kind are necessary for the conduct of life in civilized communities: and moral anarchy leads

to its own destiny. We need never be in doubt as to the issues of every new effort to transvaluate all values. Those that are killed have a way of rising again from the dead. . . . For that reason you and I can afford to look on the face of the changing world without fear. It has a right consummation because the Supreme Good lives. What we have to do, and all we can do, is to contribute our personal share of effort towards the preservation of the best.

Not many words call for attention this time: value, sentiment, classification, inspiration, Mendelism, cynicism, gnostic. But each one is important.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

1. Why is conscience sometimes wrong?
2. Reconcile the following:  
 "Good impulses count for nothing unless they become good actions." (Joubert's *Thoughts*.)  
 "Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart."  
 (1 Kings viii. 18.)
3. An army scout, discovering he was entrapped, said to himself, "If I go forward I shall be killed. If I go backward I shall be killed. Better to go forward." Analyse his state of mind, and the reason for his decision.
4. Can we reasonably compare the values of pure science with applied science? If so, what is the value of measuring the distances of the stars compared with that of exterminating mosquitoes and the boll weevil?
5. Is inspiration-value of more importance to the inner life than historical truth? Why would you prefer the record of a fine "miracle," that never happened, to an unusual but comparatively modest event which is duly certified by competent witnesses? Or is actual fact always of more importance than the inspirational idea?

6. "It is very wonderful, if it be not very ridiculous, to see a man take great pains to learn to dance; and not to be at leisure to learn to read; that man should set a very high esteem upon the decent motion and handsome figure of the body and undervalue the mind so much as not to think it worth any pains or consideration to improve the faculties thereof." (Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, in *Essays, Moral and Entertaining*.) This was written in 1669. Was it true for the years 1769 and 1869? Will it be true in 1969? Write an estimate with reasons.
7. Professor H. P. Shearman, in his *Practical Economics*, says that the union of utility and scarcity is the source of value in economic goods. What would you say was the origin of the following values: (a) confidence in business; (b) truthfulness in personal relationships; (c) beauty in all forms of expression?
8. "To-day we study the day before yesterday in order that yesterday may not paralyse to-day, and to-day may not paralyse to-morrow." Enumerate the values of history (a) to the student of any subject; and (b) to the man of affairs.

## LETTER VII

### How to Analyse an Argument

#### I

DEAR ROGER,

As you know, I am a great believer in cross-examination. Argumentation and debate I have found to be unsatisfactory. The older a man becomes the less faith he reposes in dialectic. He realizes that in the long run truth is *perceived*; hence, the affirmatives and positives of philosophy have a way of enduring when its negatives and denials are simply printed facts without power. . . . Besides, formal logic is medicine, not mental health itself. When a man suffers from an attack of bad reasoning, give him a dose of syllogism. Heresy? No. Logic is not truth but the *test* of truth.

And yet there is always a joy in discovering the flaw in another man's argument. To seize a hidden fallacy by the scruff of the neck and throw it down on the floor, hilariously and contemptuously, betrays the gladiator spirit. One sees it everywhere—in the forum, in Parliament, in the Senate, in the newspaper. A fight of any sort stirs the blood and engages us in it by proxy. Father Lambert's answers to Black and Ingersoll, first issued over forty years ago, were a real delectation. His claim that an infinite *wavy* line was longer than an infinite *straight* line, and his assertion, based on the course of the Mississippi, that *water runs up hill*, are specimen items from lively pages of controversy. . . . But at the last there is something unsatisfactory about arguments, even though "a clash of doctrines is not a disaster but an opportunity." Take the dialectical array of reasons for the existence of God—all of them marshalled in sequence and couched in impeccable language; the metaphysical argument, the historical argument, the argument from consciousness, and so on



and so forth. As a logical formulation the effort is excellent; but in regard to the truth itself the spectacle of this long-drawn-out argumentation is not without pathos. Arguments? We do not see the divine vision by arguments. God is a perception, not a proof.

## II

But the world is full of arguments, and I suppose it always will be; theological *versus* rationalistic; scientific *versus* intuitionist; political party against party; art critics old against art critics new—a surging, heaving mass of controversy, spoken and written. Some of it will overflow in your direction, whether you want it or not; hence, some facility in analysis is a desideratum. You will have observed that the arguments which actually confront you are different from those you tackled in the class-room. For instance, Jevons would say:

Men are mortal;  
Socrates is a man,  
Therefore Socrates is mortal.

Laughably simple, eh? Of course. And fallacies? Here is one:

My boy was vaccinated on Sunday;  
On Monday he fell out of the window,  
Therefore vaccination is wrong.

Absurdly easy! But in real controversies there is an amount of detail that demands time for examination. There is need to discuss the premisses at length, and the conclusion itself must be tested. Let us take one or two by way of illustration.

## III

On the front page of your newspaper it says that Henry Ford is physically and mentally fit on two meals a day. John Doe therefore says, "I know I eat too much. I will therefore follow Ford and reap the benefit." Now the stages through which his mind passed may have been after this fashion:

- (1) Henry Ford, on two meals a day, is as fit as a fiddle.
- (2) What is good for one man is good for another.
- (3) Therefore two meals a day will be good for me.

Assuming this to be the argument which John Doe employed, how shall we examine it? Simply by testing the two statements, then the conclusion drawn from them. Take No. 1. Is it true? Did John Doe know anything beyond what the newspaper told him? Probably not. He relies on *testimony*. He presumes that the reported interview stands for truth, despite the objections of a cynic that Ford could not have tackled first Wall Street and then the N.R.A. on two meals a day. But what kind of meals? and when are they eaten? John Doe's two meals may show a decided preference for pork, and, maybe, a sly love for bootleg. In that event his two meals will be vastly different from the two meals he proposes to imitate.

Again, does it follow that what is good for one man is good for another? We know it does not. A young boxer, in training for a big match, must eat carefully; but he cannot afford to be parsimonious in amounts. A big man of forty, healthy and vigorous, would not find many physicians ready to cut him down from three to two meals a day. Human bodies have individualities, like human minds; and the diet that aids one man is a hindrance to another. Hence, John Doe's conclusion is wrong.

What was actually in his mind was probably the notion that if he followed a great man he, too, would approach greatness; just as the savage who squeezes the liquid out of the eyes of a hawk into his own eyes hopes to improve the distance and clarity of his vision. If saving a dollar a day in meals will give Mr. Doe the business acumen and financial strategy of Henry Ford, then Mr. Doe will make the great renunciation. Naturally!

#### IV

But there are arguments of a very different calibre. Take the old statement of Carl Vogt, revised in recent times, that the brain secretes thought as the liver secretes bile. This is an argument from analogy. It is not put

forward as an illustration merely. It states emphatically that the two methods of secretion—physical and mental—are identical. The only difference is, of course, that one secretion is visible and material, and the other is invisible and non-material. This, in itself, is a chasm as yet unbridged. . . . We have first to decide how the liver secretes bile. Having decided that—and authorities are mostly in agreement—we have to study the functions of the brain and discover thought in the very act of secretion. But how? Nobody knows. You may expose a living animal's liver and gain knowledge of its processes; and you can take the bile and examine it. You cannot, however, isolate a thought *per se* and put it under the microscope; and although you might watch the exposed brain of a living man during an operation, you would gain no information as to how cells originate ideas.

The fact is this: that there is no true analogy between the production of thought and the production of bile. We have no authority for saying that the brain *secretes* anything. Hence, the word secretion, as applied to thought, is improperly used. Further, what analogies are there between bile and thought as products? Bile is produced for distribution. Thought is produced for service, and, unless it is stored in memory, intelligent life becomes impossible. Store your bile, however, and you have to call in a doctor, or take a draught to ensure a more lively liver. Bile is quantitative, and can be stated in terms of chemical analysis. Thought is qualitative and defies all analysis except that of its own sphere. Finally, as we do not know what a thought is in itself, how can we presume to compare it with the material production of a large bodily gland? And if we are totally unable to account for consciousness, which is the basis, so to speak, of all thinking, have we any right to dogmatize as to its exact functions? There is no ego in the liver, but there is one in the brain, although perhaps not in the pineal gland as Descartes believed. The liver may contain an instrument for power, as Dr. Crile claims, but it is not the seat of intelligence. Altogether, then, Vogt's analogy is too weak and superficial for the tremendous fact he would build upon it.

Personally, I regret our continued ignorance of the secrets of thought. But at the same time I protest against

those people who, in the interests of a materialistic creed, are inclined to assume that they know these secrets. They do not. And occasionally they need to be reminded of their failure. That scientific friend of yours who, you tell me, has every one of life's enigmas neatly explained on mechanical lines, should be called upon to discourse on the chemistry of a static idea as distinct from a dynamic idea; on the atomic changes which differentiate his unbelief from your faith; and on the kind of vibration which marked the difference between men so far apart as Leo Tolstoy and Jacques Loeb. Can he do it? I know he cannot.

Here, again, is another kind of argument. It is from Fichte, and may be taken as a good statement of absolute idealism.

"There is absolutely nothing permanent either without or within me, but only an unceasing change. I know absolutely nothing of any existence, not even my own. I myself know nothing, and am nothing. Images there are. I myself am one of these images. . . . Perception is a dream; thought—the source of all existence and all reality which I imagine to myself of my existence, of my power, of my destination—is the dream of that dream."

I once read this quotation to a scientific friend, and at the end of it he said, using colloquial speech, "Seems to have got it bad, doesn't he?" Plainly he did not believe that Fichte was sincere. Yet there is no reason to doubt his sincerity. We may dislike advanced idealism because it sounds so impossible, but dislike does not refute its claims any more than Bernard Shaw's dislike of science proves that the astrophysics and stellar distances of the texts are contrary to fact. So let us cross-examine the idealist. For instance, was he not sure that his name was Fichte and not John Barleycorn? Was he not certain that he wrote the words "there is nothing permanent," and not the words "everything is stable and unchanging"? Would he have agreed to the statement that he was born in Paris of an American father, and a German mother, and that he was anti-

German in his opinions? I do not know what Fichte would have said by way of answer to these wilfully impertinent questions, drawn up to help him to accentuate a few straggling certainties that struggled for a place in consciousness; but the true idealist would, of course, declare that these questions were as unreal as the facts which they sought to controvert. If he is sure of nothing, he is naturally uncertain of his cross-examiner's existence, and equally doubtful of the questions vigorously hurled against the idealistic position. A man who confesses "I know nothing and am nothing," is too shadowy for argument; he evades all inquiries; he eludes analysis, and when you think you have got him he is found where he was at the start.

## VI

I offer you one more specimen argument in the form of a dialogue called—*Where is the Mind?*

CHARLES: You are in the room with me?

JAMES: Admitted. We are more in the centre of the room than in any other part of it.

CHARLES: And isn't your mind more in one part of your body than another? It is more in your brain than in your feet, isn't it?

JAMES: Agreed.

CHARLES: Then the you we call James, the essential self, occupies a spot in the brain, and is consequently material, for it occupies space?

JAMES: You work too fast. The mind as a non-material entity must touch the physical system somewhere, namely, the brain; but that does not make it a material thing.

CHARLES: But the brain is the mind's headquarters, isn't it?

JAMES: Yes, but I myself am not my brain, although I function through it and by it.

CHARLES: You miss the point. Is not the you more in the front of your head than at the back?

JAMES: I see it is necessary to humour you by an affirmative.

CHARLES: Well, then, there is a space in your brain where you, James, are more fully present than in any other brain area.

JAMES: No. I am *in* space but not *of* it.

CHARLES: I fear we can't agree on that. But to proceed. Where is the self, called you, when you are asleep?

JAMES: In the Unconscious. It ceases to exist on the conscious plane. Is not that your view?

CHARLES: Obviously.

JAMES: Then how can it occupy space if it ceases to exist on the conscious plane?

CHARLES: A football may be full of wind or empty, but the football remains, doesn't it?

JAMES: Far-fetched. Listen. I am conscious at this moment. Does my consciousness take up literal space in my brain?

CHARLES: That is how I see it.

JAMES: Then does the unconscious occupy space also?

CHARLES: Presumably. Consciousness is being upstairs; unconsciousness is being downstairs. But it is all one house—the brain.

JAMES: Maybe so, but your spatial statements do not make the mind itself spatial. You can't speak of it in any other way, that's all. Has experimental science ever found the place in the brain where the mind lives?

CHARLES: No.

JAMES: How high, how wide is mind? What weight has it?

CHARLES: Oh, I know quantitative measurements are of no avail.

JAMES: Yet you said the mind was material. Let us be frank; isn't it material and spiritual both, with a spiritual supremacy?

CHARLES: Or both, with a material foundation?

JAMES: No.

CHARLES: Yes.

JAMES: We never agree.

CHARLES: No, so let us leave it.

JAMES: Not before I have asked you whether the self of a man of fifty, being bigger and fuller, occupies more space in his brain than it did when it was smaller as a youth of twenty-one?

CHARLES: Tut, tut, I said we would leave it.

## VII

To show the difficulty of arriving at the truth by sheer argument, you have only to ask yourself the question, "Do I take after my father or after my mother?" It sounds easy, doesn't it? Yes, you have your mother's facial outlines, but your hair colour is that of your father. . . . And when you have invoiced off your mental and moral qualities, very judiciously giving to both parents a fair division of excellences, but loading up father with every other responsibility, you think you have handled the matter as fairly and discreetly as such an obscure issue will allow. Then you hear of Galton's law of ancestral inheritance; that offspring derive one-fourth of their heredity from each parent, one-sixteenth from each grandparent, and one thirty-secondth from each great grandparent. You therefore set to work again on more scientific lines.  $\frac{1}{4} - \frac{1}{16} - \frac{1}{32}$ . . . . But after figuring, estimating, cancelling, and figuring again, you find you are "no forrader." Heredity is too intricate. And the authorities are not agreed. Sometimes it looks as if intellectual heredity were no more than a subconscious preference, due not to inheritance but to the early associations of childhood.

You will see, then, that the rules for analysing an argument are not difficult in themselves; in fact they are simple. You ask these questions: (1) What are the statements made? (2) Who made them? (3) Are they true? (4) Is the reasoning logical? The second question may appear to be unnecessary, as the personal element, according to logicians, does not affect the argument. True; but if I find a theory of idealism in Mrs. Eddy's works, which controverts that of Berkeley, her slender qualifications as a philosopher cannot be ruled out of account. They introduce a probability of error that must be remembered.

## VIII

In conducting a personal argument—a habit which is not to be indulged to excess—you will find the need of patience, charity and tolerance; for often there is a

temptation in the opposite direction. A keen disputant on the Bacon-Shakespeare controversy can arouse you to boiling point unless you resolve to be self-controlled. A flat earth theorist can tickle your risibilities to the height of enjoyment, until what you call his obstinacy causes you to be first cynical, then almost offensive. A devotee of the Ten Lost Tribes theory is not likely to call out your sympathy when he derives the word Saxon from "Isaac's-son." You desire to drive him out after that effort in etymology.

But are there not doctrines and practices—held as sacred by intelligent men and women—which you look upon with intellectual contempt? Doubtless, and yet these people deeply resent criticism, especially if it be of a *reductio ad absurdum* type. I, for one, think that they have a claim on your silence; at any rate, they have a right to ask that if you discuss the matter at all it shall be in such a manner as not to give offence to their susceptibilities. As a gentleman you do not wish to inflict pain on another person in connection with what he believes is a holy mystery; and, as an exponent of right principles in controversy, you have an additional reason to abstain. If your neighbour is guilty of believing in absurdities, you may be quite sure that another neighbour privately accuses you of the same misdemeanour. That is why we should be willing to live and to let live.

The disposition to saddle a man with all the impedimenta of his beliefs may be natural, but it is not always discreet or fair. A man may be a good Roman Catholic and a worthy citizen without having much knowledge of the cruelties of Church history, or any ability to discuss the theory of matter advanced by Father Dalgairns in his volume on *The Holy Communion*. To depreciate him because he is incompetent in these things would be as uncritical as to deprive a Protestant of salvation because he could not read the Greek Testament.

Cordially yours,

P.S.—The words dialectic, heresy, impeccable, secretion, vibration, and inheritance should be studied carefully.



### Questions and Problems

1. (a) "Philosophy does not offer, or attempt to offer, a solution of the problem of human destiny, or of the destiny of the Universe." (Bertrand Russell in *Our Knowledge of the External World*.)  
 (b) "I—whence? wherefore? whither? why? how? These queries comprise all philosophy; existence, origin, place, end, means." (Joubert's *Thoughts*.)  
 With which author do you sympathize, and why?
2. Kant says, "Take away the thinking subject and the entire corporeal world will vanish, for it is nothing but the appearance in the sensibility of our subject." How would you argue against this statement, using geology, for instance, and human history?
3. Comment on the following proposition: that the good lives of men of sceptical mind proves the untruth of Christian dogmas.
4. "If I am loved for my judgment or my memory," said Pascal, "am I truly loved? No, for I can lose these qualities without losing myself. Where, then, is this self if it be neither in the body nor the soul? And how love the body or the soul if it be not for these qualities which do not make the self, since they are perishable?" Can a man retain his *self* without his memory? What is the difference between a soul and a self, if any?
5. Monsieur Sixte, in Bourget's *The Disciple*, says, "Every act is but an addition. To say that it is free is to say that there is in a sum more than there is in the elements added. This is as absurd in psychology as in arithmetic." (From Professor Singer's *Modern Thinkers*.) But is not the conclusion already conceded in the premises? just as the total of a column of figures is potentially *there*, even before the column is added? Analyse closely the first six words of Mr. Sixte. Would not character remain at a standstill? . . . Addition? Is the last total the same as the first?
6. "Beings whose nature is not capable of mechanical

definition cannot be subjected to mechanical law." Write (a) two paraphrases of this sentence, and (b) one exposition and defence.

7. "The other day I heard it said of J—— that he would have made Napoleon the winner at Waterloo if he could have written the narrative with consummate art. I like that. I take off my hat to him. After all, art endures when all the squabbings of war have been forgotten." (Letter from X to Y.) Such ideas as these *do* find expression occasionally. Criticize this one. Let yourself go. Then prune down your condemnations, and get at the germ of truth.
8. "Just as a dentist is trained and qualified to serve the public by ministering to one section of the body, so a psycho-analyst can be trained and qualified to serve the public by ministering to troubled minds." Examine this analogy in detail. Does it break down as an argument? Or is some vital issue omitted? If so, what?
9. Dr. John B. Watson says, "Take away a newborn American youngster into the interior of China, and give him over to the exclusive care of a Chinese family, and he will develop flawless Chinese, wear a queue, worship his ancestors, and sit on a mat. . . . His behaviour, his capabilities, what he will do, will be determined by his family life. . . ." Examine these statements; test them on the lines of probability; and write your agreement or disagreement, with reasons. Imagine a Chinese infant transferred to Cleveland, Ohio, and brought up as an American. Inquire whether all races are fundamentally the same; what the obvious differences in physiognomy would entail; and why a negro infant transplanted from Alabama to the Province of Hunan would not have the same destiny in China as a white child from California.
10. ". . . The relation between capital and labour really means the relation between people who won't starve if they don't work, and the people who will starve if they don't work." (John Macmurray, *The Philosophy of Communism*, p. 47.) Is there no other relation which affects or decides the disposition of what we call capital and labour?

## LETTER VIII

### Imitation and Originality

DEAR ROGER,

I wish to accomplish two aims in this letter, first, to show what originality is; second, to point out the way. I may not succeed, and yet I may not altogether fail. You are one of many in desiring to have some originality to your credit. Every progressive mind, openly or secretly, hopes for this distinction. But it is more than a distinction, more than a credit to your account; it is a key which unlocks the door to mental wealth.

Imitation, a word of mean repute, is the converse of originality; and you cannot damn a man more completely than to call him an imitator. This is foolish. Imitation is a necessary element in the life of the community. You might wish to dress like Beau Brummel, but, if you did, your life in Regent Street would be made unbearable. To have peace of mind you must continue to encase your legs in cloth barrels called trousers, and wear the other regulation garments. Society demands that we toe the conventional lines. Thus we become a crowd of imitators. . . . Are not lessons in golf lessons in imitation? You try to do what the expert does, and in the same way: but when he says, "Don't hold your putter as if it were a shovel," you know that your imitation is not perfect. However, imitation is the proper thing. If you invented a new and original golf, and sought to impose it on the other members of the club, it would be rejected with contumely, and you yourself would be ejected without ceremony.

## II

Yet in many other spheres it is evident that progress depends on new ideas and new methods. These are created by men with a new outlook and gifted with creative ability. If you have these qualities in you there is a way of bringing them out just as there is a way of keeping them in. To keep them in you resolve to be *correct*; to abide by the *standards*; to avoid departures from *rule*, and to aim at maintaining the *status quo*. This is a sound attitude in certain practical issues. We do not need originalities in honesty, or in other matters of personal rectitude. But in science, economics, literature, art, philosophy and government, there is room for new conceptions, despite the existence of permanent foundations. How do we find this better way? A brief question which demands a lengthy answer. I can only sketch it in outline.

The first qualification is *sincerity*. You must be yourself. You must look at facts with your own eyes. You must cross-examine them in your own way. You must not be afraid of coming to your own conclusions, whatever they are. . . . This personal attitude has a healthy reflex influence on your mental abilities. Your interest deepens the power of concentration.

Your capacity for seeing and tracing analogies is increased. Imagination brings into being the thing that does not exist. . . . But sincerity is not a virtue you can develop overnight. You may *intend* well; you may not lie; you may stand for the right; but what artificialities have you? How many pretences? To be sincere means that your personality is your own and not a copy of another, or a composite of many. With an original self you have a sporting chance of producing originalities.

For the rest you may find the secret in a blend of curiosity and capacity, of analysis and synthesis, but particularly synthesis. Napoleon, when confessing a weakness for analysis, said that *Why?* and *How?* were useful words which we could not ask too often. And yet the original mind is primarily a unifying mind: indeed, new unities are its specific sign, and *why* and *how* develop synthesis quite as much as analysis. After examining the records of genius in action, you will come

to the conclusion that their first concern has been to find the facts and to analyse them. They answered the question: What? But such is the way of genius, they were asking why? and how? at every moment of the investigation. Hence, before the analysis was complete, they had reached the synthesis at a bound.

### III

The fact of originality is therefore quite simple. Every man who thinks out a subject for himself, and forms his own conclusions, using the material he has accumulated, is an original man in the technical sense. Of course, his originality may not amount to much; or, if it does, he may be chagrined to find that somebody else has anticipated him. Still, that does not invalidate his claim. He refused to be a copyist, and credit for personal research must be given to him. Usually, however, this confronting of a problem with a will to solve it results in such a close handling of facts that the ultimate finding is not trivial, commonplace, or bizarre. It bears the marks of rational inquiry, and is not without suggestions of a practical issue.

That phrase "close handling of facts" is fundamental. Whatever the subject may be—science, criticism, commerce—it is that long and intense look at it which opens the way to new truth. People who are in a hurry, and who glorify speed, seldom attain distinctive results. The objective may be a needed form for office use, an improvement for automobile safety, a law for the protection of property, the explanation of an enigma in history, the solution of a murder, or a theory of vision—the method is the same: analysis, analysis, analysis. Of course, there is no analysis that ends with itself. Sooner or later it leads to synthesis. The scattered gains of research come together suddenly, and the student can say, "Eureka." At that moment even the pessimist believes that life is worth living.

### IV

Originality has its eccentric forms, but these are as often as not the outcome of trick methods. It is easy to

invert "the man is father of the child," then declare that "the child is father of the man." It is easy to turn a truth upside down, or to reverse it, and say, "I can believe anything provided it is incredible." But these are mere affectations, and you are not likely to be attracted by them. Still, they hold a strong lure for people who have glib minds and love sparkle more than truth—people who like the *beyond* in everything.

Oscar Wilde once wrote, "Sunsets are quite old-fashioned. They belong to the time when Turner was the last note in art. To admire them is a distinct sign of provincialism of temperament. Upon the other hand they go on." Yes, they do. They ought to have stopped after such a snub as that. Yet our admiration refuses to quit. Try as I will, I cannot but glory in the sunset, which in miraculous splendour fills the sky as I look in the direction of the Gulf of Mexico. I know I ought to rise above this rank provincialism of intellect, but every effort I make to be a superior person is an egregious failure. Until the end of my days I shall have to be one of those common fellows, condemned to admire sunsets instead of being so emancipated as to ignore them.

No true originality is ever completely divorced from the past. It grows out of it. Bolshevism tried to make a start *de novo*. It claimed that history was a failure, therefore all organic association with its political, economic, and social facts should be cut off. Destroy; then build up. Only in a new future could the ideal be made real. So down with everybody who stands in the way. Remove every obstructing thing and let Paradise appear. Behold, all things shall be made new. . . . And were they? No. The despised money system had to come back again, and many another thing that had been despised was quietly restored to its place. . . . Old and discarded doctrines in other spheres—ideas that have persisted—have a way of turning up in new forms. Take original sin. After a long and controversial history, and after being banished from modern theology, it now appears as the libido of the psycho-analyst. The heart that is desperately wicked is no longer only a text of scripture. It is a chapter in the new psychology.

When Bacon described himself as possessing a nature which had "a kind of familiarity and relationship with Truth," he coined a memorable phrase; but the phrase which is more directly serviceable to you and me is that wherein he confesses he has a mind "nimble and versatile enough to catch the resemblance of things (which is the chief point), and at the same time steady enough to fix and distinguish their subtler differences." Observe the five words in brackets. Nearly all originalities turn on some hitherto undetected analogy. The dissimilar fact may come first, as the investigator pursues his course; but, if it does, it will soon lead the way to a new similarity. "What is it like?" or "unto what may it be compared?" are forms of one important question. And why important? Because there is a symmetry in the Universe. Nature and Spirit, despite divergencies, are formed on unity of plan. Hence, Plato's *Ideas*, and Swedenborg's *correspondences*, and the *symbols* of the mystic. Hence, also, the discoveries in science. . . . I can do no more than direct your attention to the art of thinking in metaphors. It is as old as thought itself, and you will find it in Aristotle—perhaps earlier. . . . Of course, an illustration is not an argument, and an analogy is not an identity; but, as an aid to interpretation, the discovery of some likeness in another and different sphere is often a real step forward. Think of the suggestiveness of this analogy from William James: "The relation of the visible environment to the great man is in the main exactly what it is to the 'variation' in Darwinian philosophy. It chiefly adopts or rejects, preserves or distorts—in short, selects him."

## VI

In this series of letters we are trying to outline a philosophy of life; at any rate we are preparing ourselves to form a rationale of the world as we know it. We are putting on one side the ready-to-wear philosophies which are on the market, and we are resolved to clothe our-

selves in mental garments of our own manufacture. Already we have a good deal of material, and not a few useful tools, but we have further acquisitions to make before we are ready for a tentative conclusion. I suggest, then, that we now look through the pages of history, asking the question: what are the facts and forces that *persist*? Persistence is a word of Darwinian associations in regard to physical characteristics. It is defined as "the continuance of an effect longer than the cause which first produced it." Is there evidence of a persistence that is mental and spiritual?

There is no single answer to that question. There are *answers*. One of them is religion. From the borders of the prehistoric to the present day, the religious attitude has always asserted itself. Why? Now here is a fine opportunity to *Think for Yourself*. Don't reach up to your bookshelf, or go to the Reference Library, and begin the hunt for opinions from authorities. Form your own opinions. Begin to consider the issue from the standpoint of (a) man's feeling of dependence on the Universe which brought him into being; (b) man's need of a unified life, one that is centred in the highest of which his mind is capable of conceiving; and (c) the natural tendency to community among those who hold the same beliefs and experience them in the same way. . . . You suspend judgment here and there until certain points are cleared up; and, finally, you will doubtless conclude that religion to-day is neither dying nor dead. It changes its forms, but its essence is enduring. Edward Thomas, in his critical study of Walter Pater, wrote, "It is his own as well as Pico's belief, that nothing which has ever interested living men and women can wholly lose its vitality." True, and so long as there is a human mind to contemplate the Eternal, so long will religion retain its place among the higher activities of the race.

## VII

When you told me, half shyly, that you used to keep a note-book called the *Book of Theories*, but had given it up because it seemed presumptuous, I regretted that a fit of self-depreciation put an end to a profitable line of



formal reflection. I will not be too curious about your discarded pages, but probably some of your entries were after this fashion:

That the most voluble person of either sex, as well as the most reticent, has an *arrière-pensée* somewhere which is zealously watched lest it escape and cause injury to personal reputation or do social harm. . . .

That thoughts are spiritual entities, and that the kind of thoughts, also their number, determine the progress of ideas. . . .

That pessimism is most evident in youth and age: in youth, which aims to accomplish much quickly and feels its inability: in age, because life has nothing further to offer. . . .

That in the last analysis, history has no solution for complex modern problems. Therefore . . . ?

That Christian dogmas have two aspects, the exoteric and the esoteric: and that the decay of dogmas, alleged or real, is the gradual approach to their more spiritual meaning. . . .

That facts, as we once knew them, are, like words, losing their boundaries: and that, since God is All in All, the struggle between spiritual and material interpretations of the Universe will become weaker as the unity of both elements is perceived and proved. . . .

That the World War, as disturbing to the Sub-conscious as it was to Conscious, is responsible for the intellectual and moral eccentricities of the day. . . .

That a vote is not the final unit of democracy. . . .

That the geographical direction of struggle is no longer between any north or any south, but between every east and every west. . . .

Perhaps your Theory Book had a greater infusion of social and business matters, but the subject is not so important after all; it is the reaching out to mental conclusions as yet unformulated that is stimulating and profitable. I advise you to recover the old note-book from its dusty corner in the attic, and begin it again, with enthusiasm. This is *Thinking for Yourself* in deed and in truth.

## VIII

When and where will all originalities come to an end? The question is highly speculative. Better ask whether we have reached finality in *anything*. The answer is in the affirmative. If we had not, the bases of practical life would be insecure. Human relationships would be uncertain and society would be impossible. . . . Nature herself would seem to have attained a uniformity from which there is no departure. Even the comets have their paths, as the more regular planets have their orbits. No new flowers and fruits are appearing, and no new animals, so far as we can see, are likely to surprise the inhabitants of the forest. . . . As we pursue this line of reflection, and accumulate more data, we begin to wonder whether Nature's programme is finished, except for the final dissolution to which we are slowly moving. . . .

Akin to this thought is another: what is progress after all? If Nature has approached the end of its originalities, is Spirit in like condition? That we claim to have reached finality in fundamentals is obvious. The Pope would say that the Church over which he presides may have new truths to enunciate at some time in the future, but that the bases of doctrine are final for all eternity. At the other extreme are the materialists, and Mr. Joseph McCabe, a man of erudition, who was once a Roman Catholic professor of philosophy, believes that the present materialistic interpretation of the Universe will be true a thousand years hence, which may be a figure indicating indefinite duration. Finality, again! And as between creeds so divergent as Rome and Rationalism!

Psychologically, this claim to have attained unchangeable truth is a good thing. Uncertainty and suspense have no attractions. Doubt, as a mental method of research, may lead to success; as a mode of living it is useless. What we need is the confidence of certainty. We want to *know* and to *believe*. And even when the knowledge and the belief are from our point of view negative, not positive, it is surely better than drifting about aimlessly.

## IX

Again I subjoin a list of words. They are imitation, originality, conventional, expert, creative, standards, sincerity, concentration, artificialities, composite, curiosity, analysis, synthesis, invalidate, bizarre, eccentric, affectations, provincialism, *libido*, persistence, dependence, judgment, vitality, *arrière-pensée*, entities, exoteric, esoteric, subconscious, vote, speculative finality, fundamentals.

If you will follow some of these words through all their connections, and find their analysis in other spheres of knowledge, you will be gratified with a growing sense of unity among your intellectual gains. Take *libido*, an old word with modern usages. When you have grasped its meaning in psycho-analysis, you will find references to Bergson's *élan vital*. You will even go farther afield and come in contact with *desire* in Buddhism, with the *will* in Schopenhauer's philosophy, and with *vitalism* in several authors. But all the while you should try to form your own opinion of this life-force. You are not to be a philosophic sponge, absorbing all that comes your way. You are to Think for Yourself.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

Renan closes his *Life of Jesus* with these final words: "Will great originality be born again, or will the world henceforth content itself by following the paths opened by the bold original minds of antiquity? We do not know. In any case, Jesus will not be surpassed. His worship will constantly renew itself. . . . all ages will proclaim that among the sons of men, no one has been born who is greater than Jesus." Renan's dilettante scepticism is as well known as his vast erudition, yet here he ascribes finality to Christ

as a moral ideal. Estimate the value of this testimony, and contrast it with the cruder estimate of modern rationalism.

2. Swinburne thought that Euripides was a bad poet, but Professor Gilbert Murray finds him a good poet. Devise a theory to explain this great difference in opinion on the part of two men—the one a poet, the other a critic.
3. Thomas Hardy said one day to his friend V. H. Collins, "I never cared very much about writing novels." Poetry was his first and last love. On what grounds would you account for such a confession from one of the foremost of English novelists? Was it an exaggeration? Was it the exact truth? Did he write novels for income and poetry for his own satisfaction? How could he write great fiction and yet not care for the task? By what psychological mischance did indifference produce work of such excellence?
4. Draw up a list of what can be called *finalities*: facts or truths which offer no scope for further originality. Use some form of classification in the search: physical, ethical, political, economic. It is the search for certainties in another form.
5. Flaubert said that when he wrote *Salammbô* his mind was dominated by the colour of purple; when he wrote *Madame Bovary*, sepia was the reigning colour in consciousness. Assuming that every distinctive novel has its colour, and that this colour has an organic association with tragic events, what colour would you ascribe to any three of the following? *Tom Jones*; *Barchester Towers*; *The Mill on the Floss*; *Vanity Fair*; *Little Dorrit*; *The Damnation of Theron Ware*; *The Heavenly Twins*; *The Return of the Native*; *The Scarlet Woman*; *The Dark Forest*; *The Nigger of the Narcissus*; *Main Street*; *Jurgen*; *The Closed Garden*.
6. "We talk much about the future of America, and think to measure its destiny by statistics of its educational, economic, or political changes. But the outlook for our country lies in the quality of its idleness almost as much as anything else." (Irwin Edman in *Harper's*, January 1928.)

(1) What is your first reaction to this? Write it

down at once. (2) What are your *second* thoughts? If they are very different from the first, discover the reason why. (3) What is your final conclusion? Defend it.

7. Lord Avebury, a banker, says in his *Pleasures of Life*, "I was rather startled to find it laid down by no less an authority than Aristotle (almost as if it were a self-evident proposition), that commerce 'is incompatible with that dignified life which it is our wish that our citizens should lead, and totally adverse to that generous elevation of mind with which it is our ambition to inspire them.'" Before consulting authorities endeavour to account for this early attitude towards buying and selling. How were these activities viewed in early communities? Is there any incompatibility now between commerce and the dignified life? If not, why not?
8. "The horses on the next farm, contrary to custom in these parts, were treated abominably. And yet they never formed a union, and threatened to go on strike for better food and treatment." (From a private letter.) What are the implications here as to the difference between animal intelligence and human intelligence?
9. What is the difference between a man who says, "I want the Truth for its own sake," and the man who says, "I want the Truth, but—I want to be the first to discover it"?
10. Try to invent better words for the ideas embodied in time, space, appearance, reality, cause, substance.
11. "Truth is of the elect. It is not like Government—of the people, by the people, for the people." Comment on this statement.
12. Stanley Baldwin, when Premier of Great Britain, said: "It is quite true that we and the Americans have much in common, but what most English people, who do not know America, forget, is that the essential thing for mental understanding is to realize what we have not got in common." What are those different things? Are they physical, moral, mental, political, social, or what? And what are the things possessed in common?

## LETTER IX

### Creative Reading

DEAR ROGER,

This letter is in answer to your request for a brief list of "thought-provoking" books. I am glad the list must be brief, also that you confine me to works which I have myself found suggestive. To write on creative reading *for everybody* is a task I should seek to avoid. But I am willing to write my personal confessions in this regard, even though I have to omit some of the great classics, and to give space to works which are neither prized nor popular.

I have always been interested in confessions, autobiographies and biographies. As direct records of how men thought, acted, and reacted, they are peculiarly illuminating in a hundred different ways. Take Augustine's *Confessions*—that frank, intense, and subtle unveiling of a man who knew Paganism and Christianity from experience. You can never forget it. Then take a leap over the centuries and study Descartes' *Discourse on Method* and Spinoza's *Improvement of the Understanding*, both of which are substantially mental autobiographies. Compare them with Amiel's *Journal Intime*. What striking contrasts! The ancient ecclesiastic and the modern philosophers face the same problems in part, but with strikingly different results. . . .

## II

We pass on to the Rousseau's *Confessions*, perhaps better known than the others. De Quincey's *Confessions* follow, then Coleridge's *Confessions of an Enquiring*

*Spirit*, and the later self-revealings of Edmund Gosse in *Father and Son*, of Strindberg, of Marie Bashkirtseff, not forgetting the autobiographies of Gibbon, J. S. Mill, and Herbert Spencer, also the *Journal* of the De Goncourts. All the while you are asking yourself questions as to how far these confessions are honest, truthful, unprejudiced, complete; and you will probably conclude, as I did, that only a part of the self is laid bare. But that particular part is full of significance. It is human nature in action; weak will, perverse will, and no will at all. It is the mind at work; prejudiced, unprejudiced, balanced, unbalanced, deluded and penetrating. It is the heart insurgent; liberty and licence; freedom and restraint; love and bitterness; hope and despair.

## III

Akin to this type of book are the numerous volumes of Thoughts, Maxims, and Proverbs. They contain the wisdom of the world in brief compass. Confucius, Mencius, and Lao Tze are searching in their analysis of moral qualities, and their precision of language never leaves their meaning in doubt. The Scriptures, including the Apocrypha, the *Morals* of Epictetus, and the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius come next in order. Charron's *De la Sagesse*, and Baltazar Gracian's *Art of Worldly Wisdom* are of a different school; and La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims*, Pascal's *Thoughts*, also the *Thoughts* of Joubert, are more modern. I have named only a few of these authors. There are many others, for instance, J. and C. Hare's *Guesses at Truth*, and the *Still Hours* of Richard Rothe. . . .

There are several possible reactions to the study of such volumes as these. You may say, "I have thought the same idea"; or "That's new and bright"; or "I agree"; or "I dissent." But, whatever your reaction, you are profiting with every page. Wide vistas are opened to the eyes of the mind. Suggestive comparisons and contrasts spring into being even from unlikely reflections. And, here and there, you get a key for some of your locked doors.

## IV

I do not forget the volumes of table-talk, at the head of which I would place Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe*. Goethe is always interesting and always stimulating. To reason out for yourself some of the problems which the devoted Eckermann succeeded in arousing in a master mind is almost an education in itself. Luther's *Table Talk* is Luther himself, and the *Table Talk* of Coleridge is truly Coleridge. Professor Knight's *Varia* is little known, but it is a worthwhile record; and so is the *Table Talk* of Shirley. Lichtenberg's *Reflections* should be on your list.

At the close of a research into the thoughts of such a varied group of writers you may well ask, "Have they confused me? What have they profited me? Have they reduced my ability to think for myself?" The last question is vital. If the answer be in the affirmative, it means that you have been reading in the wrong way; you have been too ready to say "yes" to everything. I do not suggest that you should say "no" to everything. Schopenhauer would probably have so advised you, for he affirmed that "when we read, another person thinks for us; we merely repeat his mental processes." There is an intelligent midway road between these two extremes.

Suppose, for instance, you have met with the following from Thomas Jefferson:

"The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions that I wish it always to be kept alive. It will often be exercised when wrong, but better so than not to be exercised at all."

I can imagine a communist reading this statement and smacking his lips with satisfaction. It is to his taste—apparently. I can also see how an anti-prohibitionist would turn it over in his mind with peculiar and wondering interest. For, on the face of it, there is a suggestion of the holiness of rebellion. It is a precious something



which should be kept alive at all costs. Even if on occasion it flares up into mischievous action. . . .

But what is the real meaning? Simply this: that the spirit of resistance which originated the United States is a good spirit; that all Governments tend to become ineffective and bureaucratic, therefore the resistance of the people is a necessary factor in political discipline, even though at times the people fall into error. Nevertheless, you may conclude, finally, that the attitude of mind advocated by Jefferson has possibilities of evil quite as real as those called good.

## VI

Take a different idea. Jules Lemaitre says:

"It is remarkable that the most ancient philosophy is completely pessimistic, and that man, as soon as he could think, condemned the Universe and denied life."

Lemaitre was a *littérateur* of distinction, but you are not obliged to accept his statement as it stands. And you need not reject it *in toto*. You desire to form your own opinion. There is pessimism in the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*—the oldest book in the world—and in the most ancient literature of Asia, but I should hesitate to say that it was pessimism in the complete modern version. Besides, these books are not philosophy in the accepted sense. . . . There was pessimism in early Greek philosophy but there was optimism also. Still, I am not endeavouring to warp your conclusions. I merely state a method of inquiry: which is to go to the fountain-head and realize the truth for yourself. A history of Pessimism would probably save a good deal of time if the analysis is fair and free from prejudice. You would be prepared to find *some* pessimism in the early intellectual history of mankind. One finds it in the youth of every modern civilized State. The real point is its extensive and intensive appearance at the dawn of an intelligent understanding of the world.

## VII

A type of book which has always engrossed my attention is that which disclosed the influence of natural

and mental forces on the history of mankind. It is indeed a slice of the philosophy of history. Rätzels *History of Mankind*, and Miss Semple's work on the same lines, also Ellsworth Huntington's *Climate and Civilization*, and George's *Geography and History*, are treatises showing how geography especially has modified human life. Lucian Fevre's *A Geographical Introduction to History* is a later summary of the entire subject. To observe how the conformation of land and sea has decided the course of events is to observe real history; a mighty spectacle of great natural forces dictating the habitations of man, placing advantages at his disposal while imposing limitations upon him. Of course, there is the other side to be taken into account, and some modern scientist, using Professor G. P. Marsh's *Influence of Man on Nature*—now found in libraries only—as a basis, could give us an entertaining account of how civilization has affected the direction of certain natural forces.

The story of the growth and power of ideas is equally absorbing. It forms a very comprehensive literature. Buckle's *History of Civilization*, read in conjunction with Robertson's *Buckle and his Critics*, is a true intellectual discipline. You will doubtless disagree with some of Buckle's contentions, but that is only by the way. What you learn is the solidarity of events: how they are intimately associated although quite different in genus. Thus you do not forget his statement—an example of many others—that "the number of marriages is regulated by the price of corn." As a statement you might puncture it here and there by Canadian statistics, but the effort is not worth while. The gain lies in the suggested connection between events of a totally different character. You can afterwards *think for yourself*. . . . Bagehot's *Physics and Politics* is also germinative in this respect. Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* is in the same sphere, and with it, on a different plane, you might include spiritual laws as seen in Chateaubriand's *Genius of Christianity*. Lecky's *History of Rationalism in Europe*, and his *European Morals*, are classics. They are not impeccable, but they have a penetrating insight, a power of constructive analysis and of just judgment which have rarely been excelled. Lotze's *Microcosmus* is a compendium of philosophic thought, possessing some suggestive chapters on the forces that have made history. Professor Shailer

Matthews' *Spiritual Interpretation of History* is one you should read last. It will tell you whether your other reading has been one-sided or not.

You will not overlook such a stimulating contribution as Egon Friedell's *Cultural History of the Modern Age* (1933). Spengler's *Decline of Civilization in the West* is very hard reading for the average man, and before tackling it he should study the review of it in Will Durant's *Adventures in Genius*.

### VIII

What of the novelists, poets, and artists who have compelled us to think by placing completed pictures of the ideal before us? Can you read Wordsworth's *Ode on Intimations of Immortality* without modification of your spiritual outlook? Truth that comes clothed in beauty is truth *par excellence*. We *perceive* it. We do not *think*, and see it afterwards, like the solution of a problem. Yet we do think when we read Lamb's essay on *Dream Children*, or Walter Pater's analysis of Mona Lisa. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is addressed to our imagination first, but later it reforms many of our ideas of human destiny. Dostoievsky's *Crime and Punishment* is not only a good story; it is the writer's rationale of life. Isn't the world of nature different after reading Thomas Hardy's description of Egdon Heath, or some of Conrad's scenes in his *Youth*? . . . You have your own answer to these questions, and you could doubtless write down your own list of experiences and profits from the pages of literature. There is a gain, believe me, in the formal record of impressions. It is one thing to read a classic, and have a *notion* of it; it is another thing to put your notion into words. The result is no longer a notion. It is a clear and critical idea.

### IX

Slowly, yet surely, you will develop an individual standard of selection. You will not avoid the new books which create great interest. There is always a reason for a best seller. But you will have a partiality for books which have made no popular appeal and never will.

I happen to have on my desk Call's *Law of Equivalents*. It is not a great book in any sense, and it has been out of print many years; but it deals with an aspect of human life which few writers have expounded since Emerson wrote his essay on *Compensation*. It is a book which compels thought, even though you often disagree with the author's arguments. He believes that every man pays for what he gets; that he reaps what he sows; not with the exactitude of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but in the way of *equivalents*. . . .

Another volume is T. A. Cook's *The Curves of Life*, an arresting study of the subject which traces curves from the earliest creation to their expression in modern phenomena. The late Professor Paul Kammerer's *The Law of the Series*, as yet untranslated, argues the case for rhythm and repetition in everything that happens.

You will have a special shelf for books which you read periodically, or which you dip into from time to time to get the flavour of ideas, to arouse the sense of form, and to induce the feeling of inspiration. For myself I have Emerson's *Essays* and *The Heart of Emerson's Journal*. The New Testament is there, and the most thumbed pages are those of the Book of Job and the Epistle to the Hebrews. Wordsworth's *Poems* (Arnold's selection) are next to Plato's *Dialogues*, and nearby is the *Imitatio* of Thomas à Kempis. Bacon's *Essays* (Storr's edition) are jostling the Apocrypha.

I have also a second shelf of used books which are for the most part critical and expository. One of them is Livingstone's *The Greek Genius*; and associated with it are Butcher's *Harvard Lectures on Greek Subjects*, and *The Greek View of Life* by Lowes Dickinson. These together provide me with a sort of criterion, a scale of measurement when I wish to compare modern thought with ancient thought. . . . I take pleasure in re-reading certain chapters of De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, and I am always ready to peruse a chapter of John Morley's *On Compromise*, or Havelock Ellis's *Dance of Life*.

I have a little shelf, always in view, the books on which are reminders. Their titles are texts, and their

remembered contents are homilies. There is Flint's *Philosophy of History*—the record of men who have sought the meaning of life in the stream of events. It is a monument of research, analysis, comparison, and valuation. And the total result is not satisfying, for history still retains its secrets. Unseen and unknown forces have been at work and are still working.

Croce's *Philosophy of the Practical* happens to be next. I don't profess to follow the argument with satisfaction, but that is not altogether the idea. I have to keep the title before my eyes. The practical has a philosophy of its own, and it may not always be Croce's; but whatever it is, I want it because I need it. If I fail in finding it, the fault will not be due to negligence.

## XI

Drummond's *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* is next. I seldom look into it now, but it did me good service years ago. And to look at its title occasionally keeps alive an idea which I desire to maintain in vigour and power—the importance of analogy. Venn's *Logic of Chance* is cheek by jowl with Russell's *Mysticism and Logic*. Chance appears to be so tantalizingly illogical that I wish to keep my mind focused on the other side, and Venn's title acts as a reminder. The other title tells me of the constant association of the exact and the inexact; the things with defined boundaries and the things with none at all—stretching away into the infinite. . . .

The thin volume in black covers, without a title or author's name, is a specially bound copy of Macaulay's essay on the poems of James Montgomery. I keep it there as an instance of the abuse of power. The blankness of the outside is a proper symbol of the blankness within.

Milton's *Paradise Regained* is also in evidence. Nobody seems to read it now. But to have the feeling that a loss is not beyond recovery is a stimulus. Perhaps it is too much to expect that every lost Paradise can be regained, but it is surely good policy to keep a possibility before one's eyes.

## XII

I must now give you something of a surprise. If you would be a thinker on your own account, think your own thoughts first, whenever possible, meanwhile giving books the cold shoulder. For instance, if you would like to know how far the geographical position of the United States has favoured its progress, don't consult the books, then accept the conclusions offered to you. Draw your own map, and place America in a flat projection of the globe's surface so that it appears in the centre. You will then see how it stands midway between east and west; how, as a continent, North America stretches from the extreme north to almost the extreme south; and how, in this country, the States which face Europe, having had a longer history, are more thickly populated; also how the States facing the west are becoming more alive and more individual with each passing decade. As you survey this map a good many questions arise spontaneously. You try to fathom the meaning of its facts; natural resources; economic progress; educational movements; political spirit; religious condition. When you have made your notes on these points and arrived at some independent conclusions, you can *then* turn to the literature of the subject. You will be a *critical* reader. You will appreciate to the full every thought or fact that is really new, and you will be a keen judge of those which are either not new, or dubious, or debatable.

I urge the same plan in whatever survey of knowledge you undertake. It is an old plan. Gibbon advocated and used it. He always wrote down his own reflections on justice, truth, the growth of populations, or whatever the subject might be, before turning to the author whose pages he proposed to read. When you follow suit, and write your own ideas of the ethics of compromise, before reading John Morley's treatise, the object is not to set your spontaneous reflections over against the matured thoughts of a master, but to evoke those reflections so that you may appreciate all the better an analytical skill superior to your own. But that is only a part of the plan. When you have surveyed the problem independently you are bold enough to disagree when disagreement is inevitable. And when you agree, as

you often will, it is not with a feeling of easy acceptance, but with a keen understanding of ethical values.

### XIII

Perhaps I ought to add a few paragraphs about books on philosophy and on aspects of applied philosophy. Fullerton's *Introduction to Philosophy* is an excellent summary. If you would like to follow the history of philosophy I recommend Durant's *Story of Philosophy* first, then Lewes' *Biographical History of Philosophy*. Lange's *History of Materialism* would prove more beneficial than the endeavour to master the technical histories of philosophy.

A good deal may be learned from Keyserling's *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, a work of both insight and comprehensive thinking. Some of the older books should not be forgotten; P. G. Hamerton's *The Intellectual Life and Human Intercourse*, for instance; Aliotta's *Idealistic Reactions to Modern Science* is a *tour de force*, and Vahinger's *As If* has an abundant wealth of thought. J. H. Robinson's *Mind in the Making* and Professor A. N. Whitehead's *Religion in the Making* are entitled to a place on the list.

I should like to say more on this matter of reading, for I am acutely aware that a brief letter may lead to misunderstanding, not so much on account of what it includes as to what it omits. However, I have at least answered your special request, and I conclude with a thought from Joubert: "Have a mind such that truth may enter it naked and leave it richly clothed."

Cordially yours,

P.S.—Reference books do not come into our purview, for they are not reading books. But you need them as aids to clarity and accuracy. A large English dictionary, one of the big encyclopædias, a handbook of synonyms, volumes containing definitions of terms—these are some of the tools of the trade. In most public libraries there is a guide to reference books. "Know where to find your facts or to verify them," is an imperative no reader can afford to ignore.

## LETTER X

### Mental Hygiene

DEAR ROGER,

It is strange, perhaps, that the first counsel I have to offer is embodied in the aphorism, "Health is the first wealth." Yet it is not strange. Mind and body are one, and, as body came first, mind later, body is the more fundamental. Biology is prior to psychology.

When the forces of the body are in working agreement, the mind has its best opportunities. When these forces are deranged, the mind's activities are thus far hindered. Ribot used to say that good memory was good digestion. True—so far. But good imagination and good judgment are also in part the outcome of harmonious action along the alimentary tract. There are few mental results that are not affected by previous physical conditions. As Sidney Smith once remarked, there is a definite relationship between indigestible pie-crusts and inaccurate thinking. You may not believe that a disordered liver can cast a cloud on one's intelligence, or that eye trouble is as mental in its effect as Gould's *Biographic Clinics* insinuates, but you cannot deny that generally, and even specifically, a low state of health has a direct reflex on thought.

If Nietzsche had been a man of height, weight, and strength, every nerve tingling, every hour alive with joy and opportunity, do you think he would have troubled about being anti-Christ, or cared a red cent what the inward Zarathustra said? Carlyle could wish the Devil no greater punishment than that his Satannic majesty should be compelled to digest throughout eternity with no better instrument than the stomach of the Chelsea sage. Huxley was often bitter about the necessity of having to eat boiled mutton and avoid other toothsome



meats. Read the biographies of noted men and you can find definite associations between food and philosophy. None of us in the rank and file is exempt.

## II

It is recorded that the valet of Saint Simon received instructions to awaken his master each morning with the words, "Remember, Monsieur le Comte, that you have great things to do." As a discipline it must have been excellent, even though the day sometimes called for the performance of very unpleasant duties. Long ago it occurred to me that there ought to be a formula for sleep as well as one for awakening. The subconscious should have its instructions, not be left without a guiding thought. It takes its cue from the predominant experience of the day, or from the uppermost thought in the moments immediately preceding sleep. True, bodily conditions are also affective in the night hours. A highly indigestible supper will contend with a business anxiety, and help to evoke a nightmare of lost fortunes. But in ordinary experience it generally happens that what you think about during sleep is decided by the persistent thought or feeling of your waking moments. The dreams of the dark are but echoes of the light.

Now my point is this: that it is wise to give the subconscious its cue, imperatively and confidently, for two reasons: (1) you prevent wrong feelings and injurious thoughts from running riot for six or seven hours on end; and (2) you can thus employ the never sleeping subconscious in constructive activity. Take the first reason. There can be little doubt that most people, even directional psychologists, leave the subconscious to its own devices. This is a mistake. I am not an interpreter of Scripture, but I have imagined that when Christ said, "Let not the sun go down on your wrath," he meant, "Do not enter sleep with indignation and vindictive feelings." This is, at any rate, a view which contains good mental hygiene as well as sound morality. When the subconscious spends seven hours nursing a grievance, or avenging an insult, or plotting an injury, the sleeper awakens with exhausted energies, and wonders why, after an undoubtedly long sleep, he arises unrefreshed. He

gets the answer some day later, when he astonishes himself by an undignified phrase or an inexcusable action. "I never thought I could have done it," he exclaims.

## III

The second reason, however, is the one which means most to us. When, after a long search for a solution, or inability to arrive at a decision, we say, "I will sleep over it," we are in a roundabout way giving instructions to the subconscious. I favour the more direct method; that is, if we have a problem to solve. And even when we have not, it is surely wise to enter sleep purposively with some definite thought or some idea of beauty. The records of original reflection are replete with testimonials showing the value of those creative associations, which are only possible when the conscious element is in slumber. That being so, there appears to be no reason why the energies of the subconscious should be allowed to run to waste on the anyhow plan. Put them to work constructively. . . . Falling asleep is like that military function called "changing the guard" or relieving the sentinel. The conscious is going off duty. Impart the watchword. . . . Give the cue. . . .

## IV

Years ago I read Charles Waldstein's *Balance of Emotion and Intellect*. I do not now recall its contents clearly, but it rendered me the service of calling attention to an important issue. Balance!—the *sophrosune* of the Greeks. Even the ardour of St. Paul did not obscure his sense of the need of it. . . . All Nature is preserved by a balance of its forces. Man himself must keep physical and mental agencies in proper ratio. Let feeling get the upper hand, and he becomes an emotionalist. Let concentration on one idea dominate him, and he becomes a fanatic. Let the love of thought master him, and like Amiel, he becomes afraid of action. Let action—"the spirit of deeds not words"—possess him exclusively, and he becomes a danger to himself and a threat to others.

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R S

Then what are we to do with those who are men of thought or men of action? Nothing. They are adjusting themselves. To-day a man of action must be also a man of thought, otherwise he suffers. A man of thought must also be a man of action, otherwise he will get no bread for his body; and landlords are not merciful. The Greeks, aiming at the Good, did not divorce action from thought. They knew the educative power of effort. It is one thing to write on rent. It is another to go out and earn it.

Balance? Yes, this delicate adjustment between logic and intuition, head and heart, science and mysticism, analysis and synthesis, is a something for which every student must make provision. One needs a mental gyroscope to preserve an even keel while sailing over rough intellectual seas. In thinking for yourself you will not always have a smooth passage. You can have repose without thinking at all, and you can have thought with storms and tempests. But you cannot have both—at any rate, not until you are nearer the end of the voyage, and then you will have no regrets for all you have gone through.

Beware of the lure of the Schools. Think for yourself. To-day it is as it was in Corinth, when Christians said, "I am of Apollos; I of Cephas; and I of Christ." We now say, "I am of Kant; I of Hegel; I of Bergson; I of James; I of Freud." Is truth divided? Yes and no. In appearance it is. In reality it is not. Each School has its modicum of truth; and right thinking collects it, assembles it, and unifies it. Original thought breaks new ground altogether. To become a devotee of one School is to introduce a narrowing spirit. You put on a uniform and must perforce fight the battles of the leaders you represent. You become less of a philosopher and more of a controversialist.

I know there is a pull in great names, especially when those names stand for one whom you respect, and whose doctrines appear to you to be true. You have a human desire to call some man Master. You would take pride in discipleship. And yet few masters were ever them-

selves disciples. They followed their own inner light, whatever it was, and whithersoever it would lead them. You and I will never be masters, but we can be ourselves. We can gather from the store of their reflections all that is wise, and we can in our own way form a rationale of existence. Intellectually, as spiritually, every man must work out his own salvation. . . . I do not affirm that you cannot accept two-thirds of a philosophy and reject the rest. Neither do I suggest that you are to be only a spectator of doctrines and theories, denying yourself any living interest in them. What I am concerned with is the lure of all the isms that pirouette on the philosophical stage; vitalism, materialism, spiritualism, mechanism, monism, dualism, and all the rest of them. Examine them; yes; but don't fall in love.

As to remaining an impassive spectator—no. *Being* and *doing* are twins who go together and work well in harness. I know that many responsible writers have urged us to live the life of contemplation, and they have made it attractive in our eyes; but thought alone, in the long run, is ineffective. Action is needed, not merely to make life complete, but as a guide to right judgment and as an aid to the search of truth. *Believing* means *doing*, and *doing* means *being*.

## VI

A sage once said that "a merry heart doeth good like a medicine." Quite true. Most of us have proved it by observation and experience. Humour is a part of mental hygiene. Laughter brings relaxation, and without relaxation the strain would become too much for us.

The Universe is not at bottom a humorous projection of being, although Renan seemed to think that a playful demi-urge was in control; but it often appears to have humour as a constituent element. The humorist is a man who opens our eyes to see this element in its varied expressions. He draws aside the veil and reveals the comic situation. You may disagree, saying that the humour of life is obvious to all those who have the capacity to see it and to enjoy it. Consequently, it needs no revealing. Then does the humorist do no more than write what is obvious to the majority? If so, why is he

so prized? Is it because he brings humour to the scene? Sometimes it looks like that, and sometimes it does not.

But let us take a few illustrations. There is a kind of humour which can never shed its light upon men and affairs until generations have passed. Take this from the *Quarterly Review* for 1825. "What can be more palpably absurd than the prospect held out of locomotives travelling twice as fast as stage coaches! . . . We trust that Parliament will, in all railways it may sanction, limit the speed to eight or nine miles per hour, which . . . is as great as can be ventured with safety." We laugh because we live a hundred years after this inimitable bit of gravity was written; but the angels laughed at the time. They possess two superior qualifications for this insight into life; they have *distance* and *spirituality*. The spectator sees most of the game. And the man with mental detachment, and with a feeling for progress, will inevitably see those deviations from sense and right judgment, which although curious in nature are mainly comedy, yet not evident as such to those who are immersed in the proceedings.

When the disciples of Christ proposed to eliminate the tares, by drastic measures, there was no angry reproof from their Master's lips. Probably the humour of the proposition was too much for grave concern. What He did say was a recommendation to allow both wheat and tares to grow up together until the harvest. To root up the tares would be to root up the wheat also. Perhaps the disciples themselves smiled when they heard *that*.

## VII

Thackeray one day flattened his nose against a grocer's window, looking at two bags of sugar, one of which was marked tenpence halfpenny and the other elevenpence—sugar was dear in those days. As he walked away he was heard to say, "How they must hate one another!" Professor John Stuart Blackie once told Barrie that he did not think that he had made as much as five shillings from his published verses. "In my opinion," wrote Barrie later, "they are worth more than that." These are cases which, on the surface, appear to owe their origin to a vital something added by the observer. In reality,

however, the remarks arise out of the facts; they are interpretations of particular situations. Humour would appear to be a mode of perceiving truth. It is thus contributory to salvation.

## VIII

In the nineteenth century students used to read a little fat book called Watts' *On the Improvement of the Mind*. It was a more useful book than the critics allowed, but I have forgotten most of its precepts except one, namely, the need of having clear and distinct ideas. Perhaps I needed that exhortation more than most. . . . However, the need would appear to be still urgent, for I find Kant himself charged with confusion. Hegel is said to be "cloudy." William James "missed the point." Nietzsche "forgot" to take something into account. . . . Jeans and Eddington have "overlooked" something. In fact, all thinkers are accused of a want of clarity somewhere. Doubtless much of this sort of thing is to be expected in controversy, but the nearer a man can approach the style of Sir William Hamilton, or Schopenhauer, the better. Clarity is not accuracy, but accuracy is seldom possible without clarity.

All along I have been advising you to *write* your opinions. There is no better way of avoiding mistaken ideas. And, if you meet with a difficult passage, try to paraphrase it. You get to the heart of it in no other way. Perhaps, in some cases, a preliminary analysis of important words is necessary, especially if the words be like the word *Idea* in Hegel or in Plato. *Substance* is another. *Virtue* is a third. The meaning attached to words by the writer is your first objective; not what it means now.

In order to be fair to any author you must obtain an understanding of what he says, and you must also get his point of view. Clarity, therefore, is a courtesy which the writer offers to the reader, and the reader should graciously return the compliment.

## IX

I do not suppose that you include yourself among the people who love argument for its own sake. That



there are numbers of such people is certain; and it is also certain that they do not increase their social popularity by indulging this habit, however much or little they enlarge their intellectual prestige. These gladiators, never more happy than when disembowelling a fallacy, go about like roaring lions seeking whom they may devour. Is it Idealism? They will give you one blow of the realist hammer and your idealistic arguments will be laid in the dust. Yes, sir. And they will tear your Free Trade pleas into tatters. In their hands political arguments other than their own disappear down the wind. They have decisions on everything, and reasons for these decisions; ticketed, docketed, and pocketed ready for instant use.

These "argufiers" I like not even a little. They are mental pugilists so self-conscious and self-centred that they have the effrontery to put on the gloves and fight everybody for nothing. It would be more dignified to make a charge for the exhibition. Then one could avoid it. But they rig up the stage and the ropes anywhere; in the drawing-room, in the train, in the—no, not the subway. That's safe because of the noise. . . . Well, if you ever find a man coming up to you with an inquiring look and a question (e.g. "What stand do you take in determinism?"), get away as soon as you can. Controversialists may arrive at the truth eventually, but they never seem to enjoy it. And a good number never arrive at all. They miss their way. Their intense love of dialectic for its own sake suggests a state of universal doubt with its need of perpetual conviction. If not, it is a morbid love of warfare.

I refer to it here more especially because even in a small degree the disease known as argumentitis is a hindrance to thinking. Thinking is primarily *inquiring*. Follow Plato in his dialogues and you will see how the large part of the discussion is taken up by investigations into words, obtaining assent to pleas, and marshalling facts into groups. There are arguments aplenty in the form of inferences, but there is no argumentitis, unless he is poking fun at the Sophists. Good mental hygiene enables us to avoid all such disorders. To "argufy," as the popular word has it, is not to think creatively. It is rather like throwing pies in the film industry, plastering your opponent's face so that he is

shamed by your victorious assault. . . . Avoid the strife atmosphere. It is not conducive to clarity of thought or peace of mind.

In one of your letters you referred to the way in which Charles Darwin allowed his mind to deteriorate in regard to music and poetry, and how A. R. Wallace appeared to give the reins to a credulous nature. Darwin's æsthetic loss was due to lack of time for the fine arts. His day was twenty-four hours long, and he often wished it was longer. Wallace's case is different. His mind was of a type that called for discipline. Rich as it was in many ways, and fine as it was in the powers of induction, there can be little doubt that intellectually he was more ready to affirm than to deny. He said Yes to most things. He said Yes to phrenology, to spiritualism, to Robert Owen's philosophy of human nature, and to other schemes with little or no science in them. Only in regard to vaccination did he say No.

I contend that it is one function of mental hygiene to preserve the power of right judgment, or perhaps I should say to avoid those tendencies which result in poor judgment. What are those tendencies? Natural curiosity of mind; love of rapid decisions for rapidity's sake; and an overweening preference for the practical as against the theoretical. Take phrenology. I have never known a man of really scientific temper and habit who accepted "bumps." I have known some who accepted a few external forms as indicative of internal character, but phrenology as a science is a bird of another colour. And yet one finds men and women of undoubted intelligence who cage this bird with pride. Why is it? Because they have *the will to believe* that it is a good bird, and sings nothing but the truth. Of course, mental hygiene ought to have prevented this will from operating so freely; for there are mental irregularities as well as those that are moral; and it is possible to have conditions that are lacking in intellectual respectability just as it is to have conditions that are socially improper.

This is not a snobbery of the mind. It is mind with a conscience. There are some beliefs, however sincerely

held, which put a stamp on the holders, but it is not the stamp of quality. A famous literary critic not long ago told the world he had seen a ghost; but from the narrative itself it was easy to see that half a dozen materialistic explanations were forthcoming. His judgment on prose may be excellent; on ghosts it is a laugh. . . . The mind is none the worse for an occasional mood with a disposition to bark and bite. I believe in the affirmative intellect, but it must have teeth, not bare gums.

Change the figure and compare the mind to a fortified position with defences against the enemy called credulity. What kind of defences are they usually? Very good; in some minds they are excellent. But in not a few the ramparts are strong in one place and quite weak in others. Sir Isaac Newton's defences on the science side were magnificent; but a weird and credulous biblical prophecy got in through a gap. Faraday rejected the popular interpretations of Christianity and preferred the tenets of Sandemanianism.

Even Goethe doted on his colour theory, and seemed to think it more wonderful than his *Faust*. It looks as if any great activity of mind in one direction is likely to beget a weakness in other directions. We elaborate our defences on the north, the south and west. We neglect them on the east, and strange notions creep in during the night, disguising themselves as members of the defending force. . . . One may almost despair of a complete mental symmetry when master minds show evidences of grave defects. But at any rate we can take warning and do our best.

## XI

"Killing Kruger with your mouth" is one of Kipling's telling phrases of the Boer War. It has many analogies. One of them is killing off one's enemies by processes of mental annihilation. I did not become aware of the amount of time spent in this occupation until I became acquainted with the mail of a weekly journal in which psychological topics were discussed. Then I realized it fully. It was seen in confessions from men and women who could not invent a deadly repartee at the moment, but always coined one later that was doubly

deadly, indicating that a considerable length of time had been spent in hating and in the search for a killing phrase. Is it the old inferiority complex at work again? Is it an effort at compensation? As if to say, "I can't be victorious in actuality but I can be in mind." Perhaps so. But this and every other kind of struggle with invisible mental enemies is a wicked consumption of time and a waste of energy which is hard to forgive. Personalities and trivialities find no place in the mind that has serious tasks and enjoys them to the full.

## XII

While I am in the homiletic frame of mind I will offer you another simple exhortation; *beware of the treachery of certain moods*. Moods themselves may be normal and healthy, or they may be abnormal and unhealthy. Take the mood of depression, for instance. If you use it as an atmosphere when you are reflecting on the nature and destiny of existence, you are in danger of a false conclusion. Not to suffer from a depression of spirits is to miss a valuable experience, for that way lies sympathy, and the understanding of human nature. But to form a definite opinion while you are physically and emotionally under par is to tread the path to error. That is the time when all appears to be vanity and vexation of spirit; and repeated experiences intensify the feeling until it becomes a doctrine, and the doctrine hardens into a dogma.

This letter, already too long, ought to include several other counsels, in order to be true to its title, but I may have a later opportunity of calling your attention to them.

Cordially yours,

## Questions and Problems

1. "Hygiene is the preservation of health, hence mental hygiene is the science and art of maintaining mental

health. As a matter of fact, there is no such science and art. Everything is contained in the two words: Avoid excess. The golden mean of Aristotle is its only rule." (From a letter.) Write a criticism of this statement, taking into account the science of mental medicine as now understood.

2. Take the waking day of an average man or woman, and, after the hours of duty have been accounted for, apportion the remaining time in a manner calculated to restore energy by means of suitable changes in attention. What criticism have you to offer of the manner in which the average man spends his leisure?
3. "Mental hygiene is no good to a man unless he has a mind," said a cynic. How would you answer him?
4. "Nobody lives an ideal life, mentally. Everybody is lopsided—somewhere. It is the secret of *character*. We purchase distinction at the price of symmetry." How do Plato and Aristotle line up with this statement? Were Shakespeare and Goethe mentally unhygienic? Is Rousseau an emotional ideal?
5. Select six cases from the texts on psycho-analysis, and endeavour to form an estimate of the part played by the following factors in producing mental disturbances: (a) heredity; (b) environment; (c) kind of education; (d) companionships; (e) absence of right home training.
6. Physical health, the right calling, and the proper functioning of the love life are said to be the three foundations of mental health. What other factors would you add?

## LETTER XI

### What is the Aim of Existence?

DEAR ROGER,

This is my last letter to you. It deals with that most difficult of all subjects—the meaning of existence. Two volumes would not be adequate for its treatment, and I have only a few pages. There is neither time nor space for preliminaries, such as an inquiry into the reason why of the superiority of existence over non-existence. And these preliminaries are vital.

The aim of the visible universe and of all that it contains can never be completely understood, seeing we have no mental powers which are equal to the task. There are facts we do not know and cannot know. Cross-examine the subject for yourself. What *is* existence? Don't be content with a superficial answer. Insist on a definition. If you cannot find one, use a description; and once more make an effort to formulate existence as an idea and a fact. . . . The few synonyms that are available will be hard worked, especially the word *being*. But they do not render much help. They do not tell us whether existence includes what *was* and what *will be*, as well as what *is*. Nevertheless, we must include past, present, and future in our investigations and estimates; for otherwise, how can we ascertain the meaning of all we see and know? . . . Yet existence cannot be confined to visible things only. There is a creative force behind phenomena, and this is surely existence in its supreme form. What, then, is the motive of creation—that act which brought the visible universe into being? Is not all existence, seen and unseen, an eternal process? . . . Many questions; few answers; much speculation. . . .

Perhaps there are sections of existence the meaning and purpose of which may be divined in part. For

instance, we can study Nature and obtain an intimate acquaintance with it, seeing we are included in its operations. We can study human life even more closely, for we are living it from day to day. And we can piece together these separate findings in the hope of securing an estimate of the whole. Let us see how far we can go. As usual we will begin with a definition of terms.

## II

The word *aim* is one of a group signifying an intention of some kind. *Purpose* is defined as "the particular thing that any object in course of action is intended to effect or attain." *Design* would appear to be a word of more comprehensive meaning. It is "thought, purpose, or intention as revealed in the wise correlation of parts, or in the adaptation of means to an end." *Intention* is nearer to purpose, for it is "a settled direction of the mind towards the accomplishment of a particular act." The design argument—that is, the argument which reasons from Nature's systematic ways to Nature's God—has not been well received for two generations, mainly because it was pushed too far.

You get a glimpse of it in a passage from Heine's *Reisebilder*, where a man of piety is remarking that the intention of the green grass is to accommodate the eyes, of the cow to give milk, and of the moon to give light after sundown. To this Heine's rejoinder is that God made donkeys because he knew those animals would be extremely useful in making comparisons. . . . Yes, it is dangerous to carry the idea of purpose into every detail; although, quite obviously, the intention of the spider's web is to catch a fly, just as surely as the poison in the fangs of the rattlesnake is not intended to act as a rejuvenating liquid. Besides, was it not a Church elder who said, "What good are mosquitoes, anyway?" The tracing of design in creation is best confined to the whole, not the parts, although a strenuous defender of materialism can say of glandular secretions that the blood carries them "through the system until they reach the organs for which they are intended." So you see that even in details the mechanist philosopher is prepared to allow the presence of purpose.

But I wish to use the word in a more comprehensive sense. The aim or purpose of a planetary orbit is manifestly to keep the planet in its right position in regard to other planets and the central sun; but the larger question is, What is the aim of the Universe itself? It exists, and must mean something; what is that meaning? This age-old inquiry is not brought forward here with the intention of offering a new solution, but in order to become so acquainted with its details that at least we may develop our own point of view and obtain a closer conception of unity of aim. I propose to inquire whether glimpses of the eternal purpose can be detected in the story of Nature, history, religion, philosophy, and experience. Naturally, this inquiry can be but the barest of outlines.

### III

In previous letters I have referred to the evidences of a plan in creation. All believers in evolution are bound to accept these evidences. There may be grave differences as to what the plan is, in itself, but it is certain that a plan of some kind is being carried out. Law and order reign supreme. The passage from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous is continuous, insistent, and irrefutable. So far, so good. But what is the final aim of the whole process? There are several answers. "We do not know," say some. "There is no aim," say others. Others again declare moral discipline to be Nature's purpose.

Look where you will for light from Nature, and disappointment awaits you. You will find pages descriptive of the beauties of Nature, like Ruskin on clouds; you will find the marvels of the heavens portrayed by the astronomer; you will be introduced to the astonishing details of the atomic world; but none of these things tells you why Nature is, what it is, and why it is not something altogether different. Natural science indeed can only inform us of the facts that have been, and are, and will be; it can say nothing about the *why*. If it makes the attempt, it forsakes its own function and assumes the rôle of the philosopher.

But Nature is a book that is also expounded by poets



and mystics. Mysticism, like that of Emerson, goes direct to the soul in Nature, and, while it is not blind to the darker side of the evolving processes, it emphasizes the symbolism by which the seen is prophetic of the Unseen. This view of Nature is often in conflict with that of natural science. It is a contest between reality and imagination. Up to the present imagination has won. That may sound strange to you when scientific discoveries are taken into account. But the reason is not far to seek. It is this: that any kind of research which gives us a purposeless existence is bound to be rejected by the thinking majority. And the average man, in his thousands, is also in dissent. Using his everyday lingo, he says, "It won't wash." Let us take an illustration of the study of bare realities in the light of pure reason.

Speaking of the process by which ether changes into electrons and protons, and these into evolving matter, returning to the ether after billions of years, a prominent rationalistic writer says, "It is a meaningless and monotonous process. It is not a mystery. It is a fact." This is the year A.D. 1934, and, as the said writer refers to a possible A.D. 3,000,000, are we to suppose that the Universe will be as meaningless then as now? Surely in 2,996,138 years it is rational to believe that a few glimmerings of the aim of existence will have appeared out of the monotonous fog of ignorance. If not, then the evolution of mind is at an end.

But the word "meaningless" has some implications which ought to be investigated. One is that the visible universe cannot, in the nature of things, be destitute of intention. A created universe must necessarily be the embodiment of idea and will. Again, how does the meaningless produce the meaningful? Nobody knows—naturally. If Chance started the ether and arranged the Universe as we see it to-day—with its marvels of the infinitely great and the infinitely little—then the mystery is deeper than ever, for why did Chance take the initiative? The one thing certain about the Universe is the reign of *law*, and a systematic creation has at least this meaning that it represents the will of a creative energy. What that will is the rationalist may not know, but his lack of knowledge does not entitle him to deny its existence.

Again, natural science as organized knowledge about

Nature, answers the question: What are the facts? The meaning of these facts in relation to the facts of another sphere is not one on which natural science can say anything at all. A biologist may use the phrase, "Science says . . ." quite accurately in announcing the results of experiment and research; but if he says, "Science destroys immortality," he is in error, for science can do no more than declare a negative finding. *Silence* not *destruction* is its proper attitude. . . . The majority of people see in Nature a progressive plan—one that passes from simplicity to complexity and from the material to the spiritual. These progressions are also observable in the history of civilization.

#### IV

History brings the human element into the problem more directly and intimately. This may add confusion unless we are careful to define our limits, for we are not seeking light exclusively on man's destiny, but on the meaning of the Universe as a whole. By history we mean the history of Nature and of Man taken together, not the ethical teaching of history. Leavenworth, in his *Lessons of History*, defines cratics as "the practical art which uses working rules, or laws, drawn from the repetitions of history to sway present civilization in the direction of progress," and those laws are the outcome of "six thousand years of experience."

Undoubtedly, the story of events contains moralizings which are of the utmost value. They teach us the art of living. We learn, for instance, that there is a system of laws for the individual and the group, to observe which promotes welfare, and to disregard them entails suffering and loss. We learn, too, that the good of the race offers one of the highest motives that can actuate the heart.

I have little doubt that the use and abuse of power, as the real test of greatness, is paramount in historical biography; in fact, there is a whole system of ethical lessons in the history of man. But the real issue for us is, What is the meaning of history? What is history? And why is it?

We do not seem to have exact answers to all our

questions, but some of them are interesting and true in part. The purpose of life, says one type of thinker, is to raise individuals of distinction, for what is history but the story of great men? Even the mass of mankind can do no better or higher thing than seek personal salvation. The production of character is the supreme object of existence. Life is for the individual.

To this there are objecting voices. Life is not for self. It is for others. Not the glory of the ego but the glory of service. The great individual, it is averred, is not great for himself, but for mankind. No self can be anything at all without other selves. Every man of distinction is in part made up of contributions from his fellows. You cannot raise a Goethe in the solitudes of the Sahara or a Shakespeare in the isolation of the desert of Gobi. Every man of mark is a composite of the life which went before him, and the life which now surrounds him. Therefore, his plain duty is to recognize the claims of others by assiduous service.

"You are right, so far," says a third type of thinker. "Life is for the individual, and it is also for service to others. But primarily and ultimately it is for God. Not human glory, not even human service is the all-in-all. Without the divine motive life is certain to lack its highest incentive and satisfaction." . . . It is easily evident that any man who followed one of these interpretations of life would be able to give a good account of himself; indeed, each interpretation is true, although it may not be the whole truth. But can you or I pretend to find fault with the altruist who lives for others despite the absence of theological belief? Can we complain that the self-centred person, engaged in working out his own salvation, is neglecting to bear the burdens of others when he can hardly carry his own? And can the individualist and the altruist cast stones at the man who lives and acts with the divine will as his chief motive? In the comparison of motives as between self, others, and God, there would appear to be a superiority in the third, for it includes not human life only but the life of the Universe. It is nearer the centres of being, for one thing, and it is as all-embracing as the divine will. . . .

History, therefore, being the story of a great unfolding, is likely to be rich in suggestion as to the aim of

existence; but, manifestly it cannot be identical with the aim in itself. The story of Napoleon is not Napoleon. The record is not the event. Neither can it be purpose in view.

What has philosophy to say about the aim of existence? Of philosophy one expects much, for its object is to reconcile all things together, and to formulate a unity. It is man's attempt to set up The One Reason Why. For more than three thousand years the best brains have been at work. What have they discovered about the problem of being? One could answer the question slightly, and say that on the whole they have discovered nothing. For, to be candid, philosophers are in such open disagreement that they support every conceivable school of thought; indeed, so potent is the conflict everywhere that philosophy is now affirmed to be *dialectic* pure and simple, not a rationale of existence. It is a discourse "about it and about," not a revealing of the truth. "The value of philosophy," says Bertrand Russell, "is, in fact, to be sought largely in its uncertainty."

This may sound discouraging, but we have to remember that philosophy addresses itself especially to the most difficult of all problems, some of which are recognized as insoluble by the powers of mind we at present possess. Consequently, we have to be satisfied with fruitful suggestions, striking analogies, and the study of tendencies. . . .

It is important to recall that the philosophies which have endured because of their inner vitality are those which concern the ideal and have sought their unifying principle in some form of Spirit. Plato, as a literary artist, lives in our memories, and the *Dialogues* are always a delight; but it is Plato the philosopher who means most to us. Kant, as the greatest among moderns, is the one man who has given us assurance of the independence of certain forms of knowledge within us. But philosophy, as such, has nothing definite to say on the aim of existence. There are thinkers who see meanings everywhere, and some who see none at all. You

now know why such phrases as the barrenness of philosophy are pronounced trippingly on the tongue.

## VI

Religion, and the meaning of existence, are two concepts which appear to harmonize immediately they are brought together. The introduction is happy. They "take." The reason is simple; religion is the working philosophy of the people. It gives them a unity which adjusts them to the origin of existence, to the problems of the world, to the trials of life, and to the prospect of death. Religion offers a solution of mysteries and a plenitude of power. These are the outcome of belief in the Will of the Supreme. "God knows, and that's enough for me," says the devout man of simple faith who has no ability to enter into the discussion of profound issues. Faced with serious practical difficulties, the same man says, "God is with me, and He has all power." Therein the human heart feels its identity with Omnipotence. Even when facts are adverse, and seemingly vindictive, he avers, "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him." Hence, when a man can say from his heart "I believe in God," it would appear to an unprejudiced observer as if faith had an invincible power of adjustment. Is existence an enigma? Yes, but God is behind it. Is Nature imperfect? Yes, but God will redeem it. Is life hard? Yes, God made it a discipline. Is it unjust? No, things are not what they seem.

From every point of view religion is equipped for conquest. "God is," said Spinoza conclusively. "God is," says the devout man, and he needs nothing more. To him the meaning of life is to secure complete union with the divine will. And how far beyond that have the greatest minds advanced?

## VII

Now let us look back on the ground so rapidly covered: history, philosophy, religion, experience, natural science. Do they elucidate the mystery? Not completely. And they never will. The Plan of the Universe is beyond our

comprehension. We could not grasp it even if it were revealed to us. That statement should astonish nobody. If, as is alleged, there are only ten men out of the millions in being who truly understand Einstein's doctrine of relativity, there are fewer still who could apprehend the first letter of the alphabet of creative purposes so far as it concerns the great whole. This enforced agnosticism should not dismay you. Natural humility of mind suggests that mystery has its rightful place in the economy of a vast world. The effort to get rid of mystery has resulted in strange notions. Nietzsche solved everything by his notion of eternal recurrence, forgetting that this itself could be nothing but a staggering mystery. Who or what caused this unceasing repetition? and why?

The progressive element should always be kept in view. The final aim of existence may be obscure, but there are ends which have been accomplished already; some are being accomplished now; others are dated for a remote future. Thus the divine will is being carried out every day, unhurriedly yet relentlessly. "Thy will be done" is not only the language of devotion. It is the attitude of science also, although the materialist may phrase himself differently. At the funeral of his research colleague he declares in the final words of his address: "It is finished. Our noble friend lived, worked and died in the interests of science. Nature's will has been accomplished. This is the destiny of all of us. Let us accept it." Exactly. There have been noble martyrs in science as well as religion; men who have died for the good of the race. All honour to them. Their secret was to accept the will of Nature and to work with it, which is another way of saying, "Our wills are ours . . . to make them Thine." Than that there can be no higher interpretation of the meaning of life. Perhaps interpretation is not the right word, inasmuch as we find the long sought for illumination in *action*: "He that willeth to do his will shall *know*. . . ."

### VIII

But union with the whole world seems to be the secret, and that union is necessarily spiritual. Echoes of it are

found everywhere. What but this did Goethe mean when he urged us to resolve to live in the Whole? And did not Spinoza say that "the greatest good is the knowledge of the union which the mind has with the whole of Nature"? The intellectual life of to-day is largely an enthusiasm for sections of knowledge and action. We lack symmetry. We have no true balance. We are specialists, each busy with his speck of dust or his distant star. . . . Yet life itself is one, and those people who have unified existence have an orbit and a centre round which to revolve.

Ask yourself, and ask your fellows. "What is your unity?" Nature? Law? Fate? Will? . . . Whatever it is, it leaves its mark. It gives a meaning to existence, or it does not. It imparts pessimism, or it imparts a confident hope. But the man whose unity is God has the key to the Whole.

Adieu.

Cordially yours,

### Questions and Problems

1. If the soul is a product of Nature, when and how did it become possessed of the power to guide human destinies and to use natural forces?
2. What criticisms have you to offer to the statement that human progress is an illusion?
3. If progress is an illusion, what is the reality? Is it balance? or retrogression? Give reasons.
4. "The spiritual interpretation of history . . . must be found in the discovery of spiritual forces co-operating with geographic and economic to produce a general tendency towards conditions that are truly personal." (Shailer Mathews, *The Spiritual Interpretation of History*.) Enumerate the geographic, economic, and spiritual forces here referred to, and compare their value as producers of persons.
5. Distinguish between purpose as seen in (a) individual life, (b) the aim of community, (c) commercial aims, and (d) the policy of a nation. Presumably, each

individual existence has an aim. How would you describe it? And what is a corporate aim?

6. If the individual achieves more and better things by means of an active purpose, as contrasted with an objectless life, give reasons why a nation should, or should not, possess a similar purpose.
7. Paul Valéry, the French poet, suggests that the entire Universe agonizes to be what it is not. Compare the thought with St. Paul's well-known passage, "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now, waiting for . . ." How far does man share this plan of Nature, the pain of a destiny withheld?
8. "If a vote were taken among the leading thinkers of Europe on the proposition that Aryan culture is to-day headed for destruction, in all probability the ayes would have it." (Dr. S. Parkes Cadman, in *Imagination in Religion*, p. 60.) Estimate the probable voting on this proposition by (a) those engaged in manual labour; (b) the white collar workers; (c) the members of women's clubs; and after tabulating the results compare them with the opinion of leading thinkers abroad.
9. An inventor produces a ray which is said to have the power to destroy life *en masse*, so that directed on to a city's population, men, women and children are killed instantaneously—one hour being sufficient to kill the inhabitants of a 75,000 city. Is this progress? or is it retrogression? Argue the pros and cons fully.
10. Professor James says in *A Pluralistic Universe* that "a man's vision is the great fact about him." By what other standards are men measured?
11. "Truths that matter are those with vital association. Truths that are of little or no consequence have no practical importance or real influence. Who cares whether molecules exist? or whether the philosophy of Gassendi will live or not?" Estimate the accuracy of these statements.
12. "The men who have investigated existence most freely are often in despair as to whether the whole has a meaning or not. The men of no education, and whose lives have been spent in toil, appear to be certain, not only that life has a meaning, but that



they know what it is. In fact, the great majority of average people among civilized nations regard life as a gift of God, to whom they are responsible. Why is this? Does education open or close our eyes?" How would you answer these questions?

13. (a) Taking human knowledge and reason as standards, what, in your opinion, would be the marks of an irrational universe, and of a rational universe?  
(b) How do we know what is essentially rational if our sense of the rational originated in a universe which is alleged to be irrational?
14. "I think that the adversaries of religion, as such, deceive themselves as to the needs of the Western man, and that the modern world will lose its balance as soon as it has passed over altogether to the crude doctrine of progress. We have always need of the Infinite, the Eternal, the Absolute; and since science contents itself with what is relative it necessarily leaves a void." What is this crude doctrine of progress? Is it material advance with spiritual values depreciating? What is the peculiar merit of Amiel's testimony?
15. "Can those who without reservation refuse to credit the world with a meaning give a reason for their position, and so justify themselves in stigmatizing as dogmatic or superstitious those who are not thus sceptical? If the world has no meaning, must we not say that it is an irrational world?" (Professor Jas. Ward in *The Realm of Ends*, p. 419.) Paraphrase this opinion, and say why you endorse it or disagree with it.
16. "Things in their immediacy are unknown and unknowable, not because they are remote, or behind some impenetrable veil of sensation of ideas, but because knowledge has no concern with them." (Dewey in *Experience and Nature*.) Why is knowledge unconcerned?







